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THE UNCLE'S LEGACY.

A NOVEL,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

JOHN BERRY TORR, Esq.

VOL. I.

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1849.

DEDICATION.

TO

MRS. JAMES FENNING

OF

TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

MY DEAREST AUNT,

That a book written for the perusal of the public, by an author wholly unknown, should bear, on one of its very earliest pages, a memento of private affection, will only, I trust, appear impertinent in the eyes of those who have never known what it is to feel deeply grateful.

I find, even from the slight experience of this my first attempt at a fictitious narrative, that the whole theory of composition proceeds on the complacent supposition, on the writer's part, that he is to establish the most good-natured understanding between his readers and himself; and if such be the case, can it be wondered at, that, having reached the end of his third volume, he should think his acquaintance

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with them sufficiently familiar to make him hope they will willingly become his obliging and impartial witnesses to the vow which he is anxious to record of his love and gratitude for the unwearying, unceasing kindness of a dear and honoured relative!

In conclusion, my dearest aunt, I will merely add, that I shall chiefly rejoice at any praise which competent judges may bestow on my work, inasmuch as it will increase its title to live long enough in your remembrance to afford me time, by other and severer studies, to offer you better and worthier proofs, that, while your kindness has been the prop on which I have leant under all difficulties, a desire to evince my gratitude to you has been one of my strongest incitements to continued labour.

I remain ever your most affectionately attached

J. B. T.

THE UNCLE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

Distressing hour! uncertain fate!
O Mercy, Mercy, guide him home!
Hark!—then I heard the distant gate!
Repeat it, Echo; quickly come!

BLOOMFIELD'S "*Market Night.*"

As the hollow wind drew a long pausing breath, and allowed the sound of a heavy, soaking rain, pattering on the roofs and on the ground, to be distinctly heard, a saddled horse, without a rider and with broken reins dangling from his head, entered, at a trot, the spacious stone

porch of a farm-house, in Devonshire, and the ringing clatter of his hoofs startled the watchers within. It was long past midnight, and the master of the tenement had quitted it, early on the previous morning, to attend the neighbouring market.

In a moment, all was bustle within the dwelling.

"There is your master, at last, Humphrey, thank God!" said a neatly dressed, active-looking little woman, in the very prime of life, who, for hours, had sat, silently, pursuing a double occupation, that of mending a heap of coarse country stockings, and rocking the cradle of a sickly child; while near her, within the warm comfort of an immense chimney, soundly slept the said Humphrey, the ploughman of the establishment, and a couple of loutish boys, their heads hanging, heavily, upon the fanciful scrolls that adorned the bosoms of their smock-frocks, and their lusty respiration carried on with a redundancy of snore that made the

large kitchen echo again, and harmonised, most rustically, with the chirping song of a dozen merry crickets about the hearth.

"Quick boys!" said the mistress, "your master is impatient; he has, doubtless, sweated his mare home from market, through the storm, and is anxious to have her stabled, to prevent her taking cold. Coming, master, coming!" she exclaimed in hasty accents, for the farmer, though a kind husband, was by temper impatient, and the wife had fancied she heard his familiar rap upon the door, with his heavy gilt-headed cane—the invariable warning, on a market night, either that Alick Wildman was a little excited by liquor (he seldom got tipsy), or that his favourite mare was covered with sweat and foam, as a consequence of a trotting match homeward, with the rival nag of some near neighbour.

Quickly, the large door, studded over with broad headed nails, was opened by the farm lads, one of them bearing a lighted lantern in

his hand, and there stood "Speed" with her white face close to the latch, her nostrils steaming and her whole frame in a tremble; but on her back she no longer supported the fourteen stone weight of her owner, with which she had so often returned from the town, at a late hour of the night.

"Sure maister's had some accident," remarked one of the servants, hurrying back to the kitchen and addressing his mistress, "Speed's a-come, but maister baynt way her."

"Get out of my way, you stupid, sleepy-headed rascal!" retorted the mistress, running in alarm to the door—"Not come indeed! why did I not hear his cane upon the door? Alick! Alick Wildman!" she cried passing, through the porch, out into the terrible night; but Alick Wildman replied not to the call.

The rough coated sheep dog, roused from his slumbers, in the dry straw of the adjacent shed, came forward and licked his mistress's

hand, for which he received a hasty reproof; but true to the benevolent and wonderful canine nature which taught him, at once, to sympathise with human distress, he followed onward to the stable, whither Humphrey, light in hand, was leading the frightened mare, enveloped by a cloud of steam, arising from her own drenched and mudded sides.

The farm-yard was, now, searched by the light of the lantern, as was also the commencement of the dark, stony lane which approached the house from the highway. All in vain; and then the family was roused, and soon lights were seen glancing hastily to and fro, within, past every window in the building. Some of the inmates ran with the ill tidings (and to procure assistance) to a village that lay not far off, and others ran to the Manor-House, where resided Alick Wildman's landlord, who was also the Vicar of the Parish, so that in less than an hour from the time when "Speed" arrived at home, without her rider, the court-yard of

the missing farmer was crowded with people, both men and women, some hurriedly covered with corn sacks to defend them from the rain, some with great coats and comforters; some had umbrellas and lanterns, and some were without any protection, at all, against the weather.

But the true-hearted, undaunted wife of "Farmer Wildman," as he was always called by his people, awaited for the arrival of none of these. Hastily putting on a woollen shawl, she had quitted the farm, with no one to accompany her, in her search after her husband. Yet she was not quite alone nor unprotected, since beside her trotted, in close attendance, the faithful shepherd's dog.

The market town was between five and six miles from the farm, and it was not until the distracted woman had accomplished half that distance that her first agitation, on her husband's account, began so far to alter its character as to permit her to experience anything like

personal fear. Then, however, as she continued to ascend and descend a succession of short Devonshire hills, the various swollen brooks, now rapidly rushing down the valleys, began to foam and gurgle with a sound of terror in her ears. She started at every gust of the heavy gale; and as it tore its mad course through the high, creaking, wailing hedges, on each side, she fancied that a hundred cut-throats lurked behind them, ready to spring out upon her. The rising moon, too, cast deep, fitful shadows upon the wet road, and these often, for a second, paralysed the pulsations of her heart, and then sent it off again beating so wildly, with a sense of sickening, freezing horror, that her faint limbs shook beneath her and the cold perspiration spread over her dizzy, bewildered brow, in large heavy drops. When she first left the farm, she would have given worlds to have found her husband, even injured or wounded by the wayside; his presence, under any circumstances, would have destroyed, in an instant,

the terrors of the dreariest spot in the whole neighbourhood, but now she dreaded such a discovery, and felt as though it would be fatal to her—so much does fear increase in exactly an inverse ratio to real danger, almost to the complete demonstration of the fact, that there is a kind of cowardice standing in the same relation to imagination that a certain species of untrustworthy bravery does to drink. As for poor "Keeper," he positively added to his mistress's perturbation by his persevering search after his lost master, now on the right hand, now on the left, throughout the entire lines of hedge troughs, along the highway.

In this distracted, agonized state of mind was the unhappy wife of Alick Wildman pursuing her midnight way, with quick steps, towards the market town when, suddenly, her faithful companion, bounded forward to a spot in the hedge side, some few yards a-head. The dog stopped beside some indistinctly visible

object, and gave a low bark; but it was not a bark of recognition, although the trembling woman, whom he had accompanied, was not in a condition, at the time, to note the distinction. She sprang forward, with a cry of "Alick" on her lips, when a man, prostrate in the mud, half raised his head, and uttered some drunken, unintelligible words. The voice was not that of Alick, and the man was a stranger, as far as could be seen by the partial moonlight.

Overcome by this last effort of agonized terror and the sudden shock of discovering that the man, who lay before her, was, after all, not her husband, the unhappy woman staggered to the hedge, and leant against it for support. Keeper, after duly examining the drunken stranger, took a much calmer view of the incident, and made many expressive signals, in his own way, to his mistress, to continue their journey, and leave the drunkard to take care of himself. But the former was fairly exhausted and remained in a state of stupor, heedless of

all the dog's attempts to arouse her. The rain had entirely ceased, and the wind was abating in violence, so that now sounds might be heard, through the comparative quiet of the night, at a considerable distance.

In a few minutes more, the crunching, gravelly tread of numerous feet was to be heard advancing along the torrent washed turnpike road, and the glare of lanterns came into view. Voices, too, soon became audible, although the speakers seemed all to talk in a subdued kind of murmur; much as people do in the rear of a funeral procession.

To this rule, however, there was evidently one exception: a person, amongst the advancing party, was to be heard speaking in the tone of one who seemed trying to lessen the terrors of the way, by conversing in the most natural and every-day manner that it was possible to assume, under the circumstances.

"Come along my boys; what the deuce

do you keep muttering about? Eh! What do you say there, Simon? a man standing on the hedge yonder! looks like two of them? Nonsense! Well, what if it is? Damme, I'll— Did you say hush, Dick? Hark! Who cried stop? Who spoke? Why in the world don't you all speak out like I do? I hate a parcel of fellows whispering together, on such a night as this. I know there's not a man here that's afraid. Come on my lads; keep close together and step out like we march in the Militia. John Squires, take my arm and walk with me. You boys with the lanterns, why don't you keep in front, that we may see where we are going. God bless your dear hearts you shan't persuade me that Farmer Wildman's been murdered!"

Enlivened by this forced loquacity of one of their number, the little party advanced, until they caught sight of Mrs. Wildman, Keeper, and the fallen stranger.

"Halloa!" said the same speaker, who appeared to have some title besides his courage

to the leadership of the band of seekers; "what's the matter here? Oh Lord! I said so, here is a murder. There are two of them dead, a man and a woman. That will do, stand back my boys—don't touch them till the coroner comes. Some person stay here—one is enough to watch a couple of dead bodies—while I and the rest of us go home and say what's happened. There's Simon there rather a bad walker, let him stay."

At this indulgent arrangement, Simon's swarthy cheek turned pale and he was about to propose an amendment, namely, that one of the boys would be quite sufficient for the purpose—when the unhappy woman, recalled to her senses by the sound of voices around her, moved from her leaning posture against the hedge bank, to the great alarm of some, especially of the last speaker, and to the surprise, at least, of all present. The position was quickly comprehended. There was a drunken, not a dead man, to be taken from the ditch,

and poor Mrs. Wildman to be conveyed home.

Alick was still missing; and, accordingly, the party dividing, one part returned to the farm with their mistress and the stranger, and the other went on to make enquiries at the market town.

CHAPTER II.

With mighty strokes most eagerly
Each at the other ran.
Percy Reliques.

Infants at play, when they perceived him, ran
Warning each other—" That's the wicked man : '
He growl'd an oath, and in an angry tone
Cursed the whole place, and wish'd to be alone.
Crabbe.

In terrible anxiety wore away the remainder of the night, at the farm house. Parties of seekers were continually going and coming during it, but a clear fresh morning, late in October, opened upon the scene without any

tidings of the lost man having been received. It appeared, as the only result of the many and varied enquiries that had been made, both in the market town and throughout the neighbourhood, that, after the main business of the market day had been transacted, Wildman had, as usual, retreated to the Inn at which he invariably quartered his mare, and remained there, for several hours, drinking in company with other farmers.

Those were times when even the "small farmers," of the county prided themselves in being able to indulge in brandy-and-water on market nights, with an extra bowl or two of punch at fair time, and therefore these weekly meetings, at the different county town inns, were frequently scenes of the greatest conviviality, not always ending short of excess and downright drunkenness.

On the occasion to which we now allude, the glass, tale, and song, had circulated freely, and the stormy weather out of doors was little

regarded by the merry party assembled in the best parlour of the Bell Inn, in the town of ——. A large fire of mingled Welsh coal and hard wood blazed half up the broad chimney, flickering cheerily upon the figured Dutch tiles which adorned the sides, and throwing its warm glow far out upon the white sanded floor of the comfortable room, now canopied, over head, by the dense, curling clouds of tobacco created by the smokers.

The long black hands of the large clock, in the passage, had been, for hours, perseveringly engaged on the bright brass dial plate in marking the advance of unreturning moments, and the longest of them was on the point of scoring off another of the little circles so few of which make up the span of man's life—in other words, the hour of eleven was about to be struck when, almost suddenly, the late noisy drinkers grew comparatively silent. This effect was created by the entrance, among them, of a person who was evidently an unwelcome guest. Having

ordered in some ale, he commenced addressing himself to various members of the company present; but his remarks were received with great coolness, and sometimes with undisguised dislike. At length, his free-and-easy manner changed into a tone of violence; seizing the jug before him, he flung its contents in the face of a little man who had been gradually edging away from him, under the frequent pretence of relighting his pipe; and taking out of his pocket a leathern purse, he challenged any farmer in the room to count guineas with him. The man was well known in the neighbourhood by his low and blackguard character, and by his pugilistic powers, which were unquestionably considerable. His present outrage was gross even for him, and, as no one seemed inclined to venture on the administration of manly punishment upon the offender, the room, to judge by the simultaneous call for hats and great coats, appeared likely soon to fall to his

exclusive occupation. This movement added to the triumph of the bully.

"D—n you, and what if you be gentlemen farmers," he exclaimed, "I pay my way, and that is more than many of you can do."

"Ay, but where does the money come from?" replied a voice like thunder, half trembling with the effect of too long suppression.

"Let any of you," continued the intruder, "put down twenty golden guineas on the table to-night;" and he immediately told forth that sum, with a clinking sound, among the half emptied glasses and decanters.

"D—n thee villain!" again answered the former voice, with a contemptuous intonation, "there are fifty to thy twenty, and I have not stolen them from any man."

"Alick Wildman," said a white-haired man, in a quiet accent, "you are a respectable man, and known in the neighbourhood; our class

must not suffer by a brawl with a frequenter of pot-houses. Put up your money; I am sorry to see you use it so badly."

The eyes of the bully were fixed with a greedy look upon the coins on the table.

The grey-headed Nestor concluded his reproach of his neighbour by saying, in a lower key:

"And, Alick, let me warn you, as a friend, against displaying your gold in the sight of one who would stick at nothing to become possessed of it."

This counsel was approved by many present, but others applauded in ill-suppressed words the conduct of their champion; and Wildman accepting the encouragement, and feeling that, having however unwisely entered into the quarrel, he might as well push it to its natural conclusion, immediately resolved on a bolder line of argument.

"Ramsay," said he, with the coolness of determination, "I seldom speak my mind

plainly to such as you, but I will do so now, notwithstanding the well meant counsel of men that I know to be my friends. I have seen you this very day, in the market, cheat a poor man, in horse-dealing—I have seen you rise in the neighbourhood by roguery and ruffianism, preventing the complaints of your victims by the most brutal threats against themselves and their families—I know that, although you are a great fighter, you are a great coward. Your strength is in your arm, and not in your heart. To-night, you have dared to intrude among honest farmers, who are as far above you in the world as they are in character. I know you have often desired to try your hands on me; if you have anything of a man in you, you have now a chance of doing so. There, knave, take that, to begin with; you shall soon have more:" and the speaker dealt the villanous looking man before him a blow, over the shoulder, with his heavy cane.

The latter was, for a moment, fairly cowed

by the words and the blow, and hardly moved beneath the stroke. In fact, like most bullies, he was checked by the sudden appearance of a man of real courage. Shame, however, came to his aid, and hoping, secretly in his heart, that Wildman would be restrained, by his friends, from going further, he demanded, with regained assurance:

"Fair play, and a clear room."

"That you shall have!" cried his opponent, "and your choice, too, of hands or sticks for the fight."

"I choose sticks, then," was the reply.

"You'll have fair play!" said half a dozen voices, at once.

The chairs and tables were now removed to the sides and corners of the room, and the combatants took their places in the centre of the floor; Ramsay with his hat on and Alick bare-headed, his brown close-bodied coat fastened by its large bronze buttons, and his

top-booted right leg scientifically, or at any rate boldly, advanced.

The contrast between the appearances of the two men was really a painful one, and as Wildman's best friends witnessed his fine, manly, almost gentlemanly form and features thus placed, temporarily, upon an equality with the scoundrel aspect of Ramsay they experienced a pang of deep sorrow at the revolting scene.

As the combatants approached each other, the ring of spectators became completely silent —the parlour door was partially pushed open, and the red face of the landlord cautiously intruded, to allow him a sight of what was going forward.

Ramsay, who was armed with a heavy bludgeon of knotted black thorn, gave the first blow, but although it fell with weight sufficient to stun an ox, his unmoved and dexterous opponent received it on his slanting cane, with such ease and precision as safely to con-

duct its force, on one side of him, to the ground; and the savage dealer of the stroke, being thus taken off his strength and unable for a moment to recover himself—Alick, with the rapidity of lightning, took advantage of the position by retorting a blow that unerringly reached the exposed temple of his antagonist, and sent him tumbling upon the floor.

"Well done, Wildman!" exclaimed the little man who had had the pot of ale, not long before, thrown in his face; but he who was thus addressed took no notice of the friendly applause. He maintained his former attitude, merely glancing at his trusty weapon, and, for a moment, bending it into the form of a bow, to see that it had sustained no fracture in the round just concluded so satisfactorily.

The fallen bully, however, was not a man to be beaten by a single blow, how well so ever planted. Almost instantly recovering himself, he sprang again to his feet, shortened his stick by one half, struck out, rapidly, several times

in succession, and rushing in to a close with his adversary, delivered him a tremendous blow upon the mouth, which made a couple of his front teeth spin out of their sockets, like splintered glass, and gashed open his upper lip. Then grasping one another with their sinewy arms, the two men struggled desperately for the fall for a few seconds, and then both of them went down, Alick Wildman undermost.

With equal alacrity and unabated courage, the combatants regained their feet, and instantly renewed the fight. The sticks clattered, and the hands which held them suffered in the encounter. Ramsay, again, shortened his and made an attack similar to the last; but Alick now understood the manœuvre, and was prepared to meet it. Keeping his ground until Ramsay came rushing in, he suddenly moved a pace backwards—his opponent's blows, consequently, all fell short of their mark, and the man was, therefore, thrown into such confusion, by the unexpected frustration of his

succession of short rapid cuts, that he continued to rush round and round the room, after his antagonist, without a single one of his blows producing any affect, while, at the same time, Alick had nothing to do but to preserve his coolness, retreat with judgment, and to seize the best opportunities for most effectually damaging the exposed person of his villanous adversary: nor did he fail in these tactics. At last Ramsay struck in perfect blindness, and then he received a second blow on the temple, which laid him insensible in the ring.

"There, take him out of the room," said the triumphant farmer; "I am heartily sick of my brutal work; God forgive him and me, if I have killed so black a villain."

A couple of half-tipsy ostlers took up the beaten bully and carried him into the yard. Alick ordered them to give him some brandy as a restorative, but the fellows thinking either that cold water would be most effectual or more easily administered, held his head under

the pump, and let the stream pour upon him, until his consciousness returned.

With a fearful oath of vengeance, the man shook himself dry, and left the inn, and soon afterwards the farmers, also, left mounted on their nags, some in one direction, some in another, singly and in pairs, according to the localities of their respective homes.

A medical man having been summoned to the Hostlery, and sewn up and plastered securely the cut lip of Alick Wildman, he, too, set off homeward, alone, at about one o'clock in the morning.

Such was the result of the subsequent enquiries made after the missing man. Before clearing the town, he had to cross the river by a narrow, precipitous bridge, with a slippery paved way, and low dangerous parapets, which at night were almost imperceptible to a person crossing, in a vehicle, or on horseback. By many it was thought probable he might have fallen off his mare, over this bridge, and so

been lost; but as a bargeman who had been all night on board his craft, in the river, near at hand, afterwards swore that he particularly observed every rider who passed, and that he distinctly saw Wildman, as the last of them, cross it in safety, that idea was at once abandoned. Nevertheless, some persons adhered to it again, in a day or two afterwards, when the well known broad brimmed hat of the supposed deceased was picked up by a boatman who found it washed in among the long brown rushes, on one of the banks of the same river.

We must now return to Knowle-water, which was the name of Alick's farm.

Here the excitement of the preceding night had passed away and left a deep and hopeless gloom. The widowed mistress, however, was not a person to sit down and weep over her affliction. She had mounted her favorite hackney, early in the morning, and was still

scouring the country, to obtain tidings of her husband.

The drunken stranger who had been taken from the ditch, and brought to the homestead, over night, rested happily on his clean straw in the stable, until daylight awakened him, and then, with an imperfect recollection of where he had been and what he had witnessed, he crept into the hay loft, where he fortunately met with a well filled hen's nest, the eggs out of which he ate raw, and then letting himself down from the open window, into the yard, forthwith quitted the premises, unseen, and made his way to a little sea port on the neighbouring coast of the Bristol channel, celebrated as the haunt of a crew of desperate smugglers.

Gradually, as the day advanced, the thousand reports, circulating through the neighbourhood, began to be absorbed by one of an all prevailing character. Strong suspicions had fastened around Isaac Ramsay, as the murderer of the

missing farmer. No one appeared to be possessed of anything like a proof of the deed, but as the suspected person was generally disliked by those who knew him, the belief of his guilt was willingly entertained, and by public consent, therefore, he was as emphatically condemned, as a murderer, as though the judge had already passed sentence of death upon him.

There was, moreover, another circumstance that not a little tended to confirm the current reports. Ramsay, why or wherefore nobody knew, but all guessed, came, early in the morning, with his swollen head and bruised face, to the little way-side ale-house, in the adjacent village to Knowle-water, and staid there drinking during the entire day. The villagers saw "murderer" in his countenance, and they treated him as one, gathering from time to time around the house and staring at him with undisguised horror. The children ran away shrieking with terror whenever they

chanced to see him show his face without the building.

When evening came, the rustic topers began to assemble at their usual *rendezvous;* and they found Ramsay still there. The few first who came avoided conversation with him, as much as possible, and only replied to his saucily put question: "Well, friend, have they found Alick Wildman yet?" by a brief and simple negative. But as the company increased and the liquor circulated, more boldness began to appear among them, and the suspected murderer had, in his turn, to submit to free questioning.

"Ah, Ramsay," said a drunken little lame tailor, indifferently well supporting himself and the ale he had swallowed on the only leg he had usually to rely upon, "I shall ask for a holiday and walk to Exeter when you are to be hanged."

Ramsay, with a deep scowl upon his brow, accidently moved, certainly with no present

view to the chastisement of the insulting snip, but the latter, thinking otherwise, and dreading the consequences of his impertinence, attempted to effect a hasty retreat. Dropping in his alarm a full jug of liquor from his hands, he wheeled round with astonishing rapidity, for a drunken man, and was on the point of vanishing, by a back door, when his wife, a tall, raw-boned, fierce-looking woman, entered by the front, and striding across the apartment, seized him by the skirts of his ragged coat.

"You little villain!" she exclaimed, at the same time applying her strength to his after man in a way that not only destroyed his centre of gravity but degraded him in his fall, "you little villain—"

"Oh, lor! Mr. Ramsay," roared the tailor, "I beg your pardon, sir; I did but joke, as is my way, when I get out of sight of my wife; nothing more, sir, I do assure you, upon my word. I am an honest, harmless fellow, that

would neither slander my neighbour nor steal a button, nor a needle full of thread."

The poor tailor, seeking mercy at the hands of a reputed murderer, looked up, as he thought, in his face; but instead of seeing Ramsay standing over him, his winking blear eyes encountered those of his terrible wife. At once the little man ceased pleading, for he had no hopes of escaping the ear-wigging that invariably alloyed the pleasure of his ale-house libations.

This little incident, in an instant, destroyed the remains of that mingled feeling of fear and horror which the presence of Ramsay had, for a time, cast among the villagers. They no longer shunned him, but, on the contrary, the cobbler assuming the functions of examining counsel, and the grimy smith sitting in the character of judge, while the general company empannelled themselves into a kind of jury, the suspected felon soon found that he was

about to be put upon as severe a trial as if actually arraigned in a properly constituted court of law. He, consequently, refused to answer any more questions, and resorted to his old plan both of tyranny and defence, by offering to fight any man in the company. This, at once, aroused the desire for summary vengeance which every one present so strongly felt, and there can be no doubt that, had not other parties arrived at the moment, Ramsay would, there and then, have been beaten within an inch of his worthless life, and expelled from the village. This laudable intention, however, was interrupted by the abrupt entrance of a couple of constables, sent from the market town; with a magistrate's warrant in their pocket for the arrest of the suspected person. Accordingly, they immediately took him into custody, and mounting him in a gig between them, drove away from the village.

CHAPTER III.

KITE.—Pray who are those honourable gentleman upon the bench?

CON.—He in the middle is Justice Balance, he on the right is Justice Scale, and he on the left is Justice Scruple.

"*The Recruiting Officer.*"

BRAIN.—You are conceited, sir, your name is Mr. Kno'well, as I take it?

"*Every man in his humour.*"

"JUSTICE'S justice" has long been a strong feature in the legal countenance of the country —a distorted ugly ridiculous feature—yet the magistracy, as a whole, is a respected body,

notwithstanding. Its members rely for support, especially in rural districts, on the time gathered associations belonging to their families, their pecuniary influence in their neighbourhood, and the prevailing ignorance around them. As they work for nothing they appear, *prima facie*, a cheap wheel in the machinery of the law, although it may be doubted whether, in reality, they do not greatly add to the national expense, in the item of the administration of justice, by the endless blunders which they commit, and the unnecessary delays which they cause. However, as the gowned attendants in Westminster Hall, derive a large portion of their practice from the short comings of county magistrates, even that fact proves a fresh source of strength to them. Lastly, it must be admitted that these unpaid functionaries are, generally, well intentioned men, and that every here and there, among their number, is found a person of real ability, conspicuous energy, and great knowledge of the

law, and of human life. The Justice Shallows are redeemed, honorably, by a small minority of such valuable characters as these.

The little town of ——— had its bench of county magistrates. It had, also, its borough magistrates, much more able persons than the former, but as the suspected murder was not alleged to have been committed within the limits of their jurisdiction, the county authorities were called upon to act, in the matter.

At an early hour, on the morning following the events related in our last chapter, the inhabitants of the town in question were unusually astir, a crowd surrounding the doors of the building in which the magistrates generally sat, long bofore the accustomed hour for them to take their seats arrived. It was a day almost as good as a market-day for the chief inns of the place, from the large number of country people who came in on horseback, or in car-

riages, to hear the examination of the notorious Isaac Ramsay.

The crowd about the magistrates' Hall was, at length, disturbed by the arrival of three elderly gentlemen, two of them walking arm in arm, as intimate friends, the third following with an air of rough, proud independence, yet with something in his look that showed, plainly, he felt a mixture of annoyance and contempt at the little narrow-minded, exclusive pride of his two colleagues. The respect offered to these personages, by the crowd, was not the same in character to each of them; to the two who walked together, it seemed forced and connected with nothing like genuine veneration, while to him who arrived singly, it appeared spontaneous and heartfelt, the result of a knowledge of his high qualities, both in and out of his magisterial office.

The three took their stations at a long table, covered with green-baize, their faces towards

the body of the hall, which was soon filled by the anxious motley crowd that had assembled outside. Opposite them, at one end of the board, sat the clerk to the bench; quite a young man, immensely stout, with a pair of quick, spreeish looking grey eyes, a full talkative mouth, ready for a speech for a dish of turtle soup, his cheeks prematurely red, and his light sandy hair brushed off his massive forehead almost in a perpendicular direction, which gave him a certain smart, brisk, impatient look of business. This idea he not a little confirmed by, frequently, dashing his hand through it with a degree of careless violence that made his shining double chin shake again. Two of the worthy magistrates seemed wholly under the dominion of this practically acute functionary, watching all he did with deep attention, appearing comforted and re-assured by his presence, and his piles of books, and receiving from him, occasionally, a familiar wink for their especial encouragement. This

habit, however, sometimes gave offence to the Bench, as it was thought to compromise its dignity a little. Still, the superiors dared hardly to scold their clerk, lest he should good-temperedly accept their rebuke, and then take his revenge, by dexterously asking the worthies some legal question which he knew them incapable of answering, or, under the guise of profound respect for their known sagacity, leave his masters to flounder on with their business, as they best might, in presence of an amused and sneering auditory.

The chairman of the meeting was a wealthy, tall, lank looking squire of the neighbourhood, with a singularly unintelligent look of reserved pride in his countenance. Unlike most faces, his lost considerably in the expression of mind when he ventured to speak. The eye seemed plunged in hopeless confusion, the tongue stumbled over the commonest sentences, and the brow, always deeply wrinkled, now broke up into about a dozen horizontal furrows which

ran half way back over the partially bald crown of a head, in shape and in comparative size, not very unlike a tolerably large marrow-fat pea. It was a head that seemed not to have grown since the magistrate was a child. He had, besides, a sallow complexion, a small pinched nose, white teeth, indistinct eye-brows, and eye-lids so long and drooping that they invariably wore, in miniature, the furrows of the brow, and effectually concealed, from the hasty observer, the inexpressive light of a pair of pale hazel eyes.

This prominent member of the Bench usually sat with his pointed elbow resting on the table, and the fore finger of his yellow, parchment hand pressed against his blue veined temple. He was dressed in a pepper and salt colored coat, cut somewhat after the present Newmarket fashion, adorned with bronze sporting buttons. From the lappelled pocket on his hip, half hung out a green silk pocket handkerchief, with white spots. His waistcoat was

of black cloth, with stand up collar, like those worn by sergeants-at-law. He displayed a large quantity of shirt collar, above a narrow, brilliantly dyed cravat, and a sufficiency of white linen at the wristbands, where the coat sleeve was left unfastened to allow it to appear. As a finishing touch to this figure, we must mention that which gave it a peculiar character, namely, a degree of military stiffness, said to have been acquired by some years service in the army, when or where few persons knew, or cared to enquire. It is enough to say that the worthy magistrate called himself a major, and that the circle of his country acquaintance courteously recognized the title.

The second magistrate on the Bench, was the vicar of a small rural parish, in the neighbourhood—an ill-dressed, slovenly looking man, habited in the professional costume of black clothes and white cravat; the clothes worn rusty, and the cravat badly tied and considerably soiled with snuff. By the perpetual

use of this article, his voice had become monotonously thickened, at the same time that his complexion led to the suspicion of his having indulged, somewhat freely, with the glass. He had a shining bald head, cold grey eyes, and a nose so hooked that it resembled the beak of a bird of prey rather than accorded with that outline of the feature which is called Roman. His general demeanour towards the tall squire was that of a toady, but when he could depend on obtaining the support of the clerk to the Bench, and especially, whenever he caught the chairman involved in a difficulty, he would most unceremoniously bully him, always, however, taking care not to allow the proceedings of the day to close without, again, making peace with his patron, by some piece of transparent fulsome flattery. In stating the details of business, and in addressing those whom he deemed his inferiors, he spoke in that loud, curt tone of voice which characterized his pulpit eloquence, and that invariably led the hearer to

the conviction that the minister had long been accustomed to appeal to some far off deity.

The person who completed this magisterial trio differed esssentially from his brethren. He was a man of large frame and powerful intellect, which expressed itself, signally, on a high, full forehead, gave firmness and will to the expression of a mouth naturally loose, and even sensual, in its conformation, and moulded into impressive dignity many noble lines of countenance, which bounded other features. His hair was grey, and still abundant, his eye severe, but withal kind. The muscles of the capacious face seemed, from time, gravitating towards the hanging chin, but the firm, high nose was yet unshaken—and the hard jaw appeared to defy the inroads of increasing years. His voice was stentorian, and made the air vibrate to a hundred different fine modulations of tone and expression. He was an energetic and an eloquent man—a man of business and a lawyer. How dry and inane appeared the

Squire beside him; how contemptible the self-satisfied parson! He alone, of all the three, could uphold the weight of justice; he filled the seat—from him justice must flow, if it were to flow at all, on the present unusual occasion.

As soon as the magistrates had comfortably seated themselves in their arm-chairs, the clerk ordered the attendant constables to bring forward the prisoner, and in a few seconds afterwards, Isaac Ramsay stood before his examiners. The chairman, feeling that he had an unusual case before him, determined upon turning it to his personal advantage, by entering into the enquiry with extraordinary confidence and acuteness; and it was, doubtless, fully to display the latter quality that he began, rather abruptly, with the following statement of a fact known to himself:—

"I know you, my man," said he to the prisoner, "your name is Isaac Ramsay, I believe."

The clerical magistrate's face brightened; he looked first towards the clerk at the table, from whom he received a well known signal of encouragement, conveyed by a wink of the functionary's eye, and then interrupted his brother in office.

"No, no, Grimshaw! you don't know the man; none of us know him. Magistrates don't know anybody or anything at the beginning of an examination. The law comes into court blindfolded, like the image of justice, you know—and waits for evidence to remove the bandage."

Major Grimshaw felt his ideas of the law running into confusion, like pen and ink characters on damp paper; his confidence, too, was shaken.

The vicar, flushed with his victory, looked proudly around the room; then turning to the prisoner, he said, in a peculiarly impressive tone:—

"Now, Sir, what is your name?"

"Isaac," was the brief reply.

"Who gave you that name?"

An ill-suppressed laugh was audible in the crowd; the magistrate bit his lip, blushed, and stammered out something like an apology.

"Steer clear of the shop, parson," whispered the clerk in his ear.

The officers of the court requested silence, and the tall chairman regained his lately lost place, at the head of the magisterial class:

"You say your name is Isaac Ramsay, my man, do you?" continued he.

"Pardon me, Major Grimshaw," again interrupted the discomfited churchman; "you will excuse my saying so, the man has not admitted his surname."

"My dear friend, Fallow, will you examine or shall I?"

"Hope no offence to you, Major. I merely wish to prevent mistakes."

"Better avoid them, then, Fallow."

The Reverend Mr. Fallow was about to reply, when the clerk, knowing that the present case was far too serious in its character for him to allow it to be made a farce of, as many minor ones frequently were, by being mixed up with the amusing squabbles of the bench, leant across the table and said, in an under tone to the third magistrate:

"Now is your time, my dear Mr. Maitland; pray take up the tools the tinkers have dropped, and go on with the work for them, or we shall not finish it to-day. The town, mind, won't stand a remand of it to to-morrow. Besides, I have a fox hunt to attend in the morning, twenty miles from this."

The fine old gentleman, thus familiarly, yet in a manner respectfully addressed, promptly granted the petition of the young clerk.

"Prisoner," said he, in his full, solemn, heart searching voice, "my brethren on the bench will permit me to ask your name and

oocupation and then to call for the evidence that can be brought forward against you."

"My name is Isaac Ramsay, as is very well known by every body in this room. I am by trade a horse dealer and corn factor."

"You are charged on suspicion," proceeded the magistrate, "with being concerned with the presumed murder of Alick Wildman, farmer, of Knowle-water Barton, in the parish of ———, near this town. Before we call in the witnesses, do you desire to make any observations respecting this charge?"

"I have merely to say, Sir," answered the prisoner, in accents of real respect towards his interrogator, "that a charge on suspicion of my having been concerned in a suspected murder, is one that should, of itself, be received with the greatest suspicion, by a bench of magistrates. Where is the body of the murdered man? Who has found it? It is, probably, by this time floating somewhere in the Bristol Channel. Over the bridge of this town a man

is very likely to meet his death, and his body may never be found."

"Ah, the villain!" muttered, audibly, a dozen or two voices in the crowd; "he was sure to put forward the old bridge."

"Good friends!" exclaimed the magistrate, rising from his chair and looking over the throng before him, "for shame to interfere with this business by giving utterance to your hastily formed suspicions, in the use of hard language regarding the unfortunate man before us. Let me hear another murmur of the kind and I will have the room cleared, instantly. The law, as one of my colleagues has told you, waits for evidence of a satisfactory character before it can see guilt in any man, however, or by whomsoever, charged with crime."

At this language, Ramsay's countenance expressed a kind of demon's gratitude, and the Reverend Mr. Fallow was in ecstasies at hear-

ing his legal axiom repeated by his influential and respected brother on the Bench.

The witnesses were, forthwith, summoned to stand forward. The first who did so was the burly landlord of the inn at which the single stick combat had taken place, on the market night, as above described, between the prisoner and Alick Wildman.

He deposed to the fact of the fight at his house, to the prisoner's having been beaten, and his threat of vengeance, uttered in the inn yard, on his recovering his senses, under the reviving influence of the pump water, so liberally bestowed upon him by the two ostlers. He then explained, that Wildman started from the inn, alone, on horseback, to return home, about an hour and a half after the encounter, and that he was, then, quite sober.

The surgeon, who was called in to sew up the gashed lip of the missing man, was examined, and he stated, that although the

farmer had lost two of his front teeth, and received a deep flesh wound on the mouth, yet that, after he had himself rendered him the surgical aid necessary, under the circumtances, his patient was in a state perfectly safe for him to return to his home.

The bargeman then swore, with great positiveness, that he had seen Alick cross the old bridge in safety, on the night of his disappearance.

The two next witnesses were the widow of the lost man, and Humphrey the ploughman, mentioned in the first chapter of this narrative; but their evidence only proved the return home of the mare, "Speed," without her rider, and the fact of Mrs. Wildman having gone off, by herself, towards the town, and the finding a drunken man in the way.

Mr. Maitland whispered something, across the table, to the clerk, who replied in an audible voice, that he believed the most important testimony had yet to be heard. The grey-

headed counsellor, who had formerly, at the hostelry, advised Wildman not to display his guineas in the presence of Ramsay, then came before the Bench.

He said, that he knew the prisoner perfectly well, even to the sound of his voice. He had been a witness of the fight between him and his old neighbour Wildman, concerning whose loss enquiry was now making. The witness proceeded to state, that he quitted the Inn directly the combat was at an end; that he went to another part of the town, where his horse was quartered, and, in half an hour afterwards, left for his home, unaccompanied. When he arrived at a spot about a mile beyond the Turnpike Gate, he overtook, in the dark, two men, walking at a rapid pace. As he came up with them, one of them turned round and said to him, 'is that Wildman of Knowle Water Barton?' He was not much surprised at the question at the time, indeed he scarcely heeded it, and replied, briefly, in the negative. On re-

calling the circumstance to his memory, however, he now felt convinced that it was the prisoner who had questioned him, in the manner described.

Ramsay laughed, observing that he would lay a wager the veteran farmer was far too well steeped in liquor to discriminate much between voices, on the occasion referred to by him.

"Besides, who was my companion?" he added.

Not only did the magistrates feel the force of the question, but a doubt, as to the value of the testimony just given, shot through the minds even of the crowded auditory.

"Belike you had your old companion, the Devil, walking beside you, Isaac," said a common looking, middle aged female, advancing a few steps forward, and looking the prisoner full in the face.

The constables dragged her back, and appeared to address her in a kind of humouring,

hushing tone of voice. Her words, however, were not without their effect on the crowd. The witness who had given his evidence was, on second thoughts, above suspicion—it might, indeed, have been the prompter of murders who accompanied Ramsay, along the dark road, on that howling, tempestuous night.

One witness, only, now remained to be examined, but he was a person altogether so peculiar in appearance and manner that we shall venture, in the fewest possible words, to place him before the mental eye of the reader.

He was dressed in a foppishly cut grass-green sporting coat, with silver-plated buttons on the breast and on the hips; white corded breeches; boots with very narrow tops, and displaying a bright polish, in spite of the spatterings of mud which soiled them; a high crowned, glossy, conically-shaped hat, which he wore a good deal on one side of his head; and, lastly, a light-coloured waistcoat very open in front, so as to allow a frilled shirt fully to appear, above

which arose a very tightly drawn yet neatly tied cravat, bordered by a collar shaped in exact adaptation to the pointed corners of a pair of semilunar, close, black whiskers, advancing to the angles of a mouth, the most habitual expression of which was that of a sneer turned upside down, and with difficulty retained in its unnatural position. His nose was immensely Roman, and his hair frizzed into the style of a town dandy, of that day, all around his head, so as to form a sort of convenient ledge for the support of the hat. To this *tout ensemble* he, invariably, gave additional effect by observing a very erect bearing, and keeping one hand partially thrust into a pocket situated in the rear of his person. If the reader will superadd to this picture the further ingredients of a short stature, and an air made up, in varying proportions, of swagger, awkward shyness, and a pretty considerable dash of a native, eccentric humour and zest for fun, he will see before

him a faint shadow of the person we wish to present.

The witness now came before the Bench with all his natural propensities greatly heightened by the, to him, unusual scene which had called him there. Having taken the customary oath, and displayed in doing so a small and peculiarly white hand, covered with a profusion of rings, he was thus addressed by the tall chairman:

"Well now, Mr. Frankum, what can you tell us about this mysterious affair? It appears that your exertions to bring about a discovery have been enormous."

The witness moved his head in a manner that seemed to say "you're quite correct, but let that pass," and then proceeded to make a brief statement of his opinion on the subject.

"'Pon my honour, as a gentleman, sir," said he, in a very affectedly, pompous expression of voice and manner, "'pon my honour—"

"Mr. Frankum," interrupted Mr. Fallow, "I have said here, once before to-day, that the law knows neither persons nor things which are beyond its jurisdiction—a sentiment which has been repeated, I am proud to say, by a great authority among county magistrates—I allude of course to our brother on the Bench, Mr. Maitland. Allow me to remark, Mr. Frankum, that you are to speak upon your oath, and I, for one, peremptorily object to knowing anything, whatever, about your honour. For the present, at least, I don't believe in it; that is, legally, I am called on to doubt it."

The person thus severely reprimanded, reddened to the tips of his ears, and thrusting his one hand still deeper into the pocket which usually held it, the left skirt of his green coat was pulled desperately over his hip, while his other hand irritably tapped the narrow top of his polished boot with a small riding whip. He

looked towards the magistrates' clerk, who gave him one of his slyest winks.

Then, turning towards Mr. Fallow, he replied:

"Sir, I should advise your attending to your Sabbath duties rather than to legal matters, which are quite above you. I don't believe you ever got through the preface of either Blackstone's Commentaries, or Burn's Justice."

"Mr. Frankum, I am a Justice of the Peace."

"Mr. Fallow, you might as well be a Major of the heavy dragoons."

The speaker here nodded in a flattering manner to Major Grimshaw, who always claimed the honour of belonging to that regiment, whenever awkward questions were asked about his military commission.

"Sir," retorted the clerical magistrate, "I am a clergyman."

"And like Moses, I suppose, a divine lawgiver?"

The tall chairman was sitting bolt upright in his magisterial seat, and his small head terribly puzzled, judging from the number of wrinkles on his brow. Mr. Maitland was on the point of interfering, when the clerk tapped him on the shoulder, and said in an under tone:

"Pray, my good sir, don't stop them; you see, after all, there is nothing in the case before us, and it may as well end in this way as more gravely."

Ramsay, who rejoiced in the course things were now taking, looked not only easy, but amused; the audience too, having lost all hope of hearing the committal of a murderer, were glad to find something like an equivalent entertainment, and so matters were allowed to proceed.

"Major Grimshaw, I must beg your assistance, or quit the Bench. This contumely is not to be borne."

"Well, done, Frankum," exclaimed the

clerk, edging towards the private hearing of the witness; "oust the parson, then proceed with your evidenee, so as to get the prisoner committed, and my life on it, you'll sit on the bench yourself, in less than five years from this day."

"I must say," observed Major Grimshaw, addressing his indignant colleague, "that I think you took up Mr. Frankum rather too sharply just now, Fallow; and therefore permit me to mediate between you."

The witness, whose anger was always placable when his vanity was appeased, offered to shake hands with his oponent, saying that:—

"'Pon his honour as a gentleman, he would be most unwilling to hurt the feelings of his friend Fallow, whose views of theology, he understood, were exceedingly orthodox, and had produced great results in his parish, and it would be a happy day for Christianity, whenever the bishop of the diocese should see

fit to promote the reverend gentleman in the church."

"That's capital," again whispered the clerk, "I did'nt know you were so eloquent; you have a tongue like oil, and a manner so conciliating; nothing can keep you from the bench, to which you will be the greatest possible ornament."

But the divine lawgiver, as Frankum had chucklingly called him, was in no humour to be conciliated by flattery, bestowed on his theology in direct, or, at least, indirect depreciation of his knowledge of the law, which was a point on which he felt he was peculiarly strong, and therefore he had just reason to pride himself regarding it. As for the witness, he looked upon him as an upstart, comparatively without education, and with very limited pecuniary means, who, depending on a local tradition of his having sprung from a family once of considerable importance in the

county, was now attempting to push himself into a prominent position among the Squirearchy of the neighbourhood. Mr. Fallow knew that the witness was cultivating a bowing acquaintance with all the great people whom he came across, and, in his heart, he despised him for it; but he little thought that so coxcombical and ridiculous a person, as he deemed him, had actually sufficient spirit and ambition to aim at obtaining a place upon the Bench of county magistrates.

"Now then, for your evidence," continued the clerk, still whispering to Frankum. "Pitch it strong, Squire; get the fellow committed somehow. Show your dexterity, your public spirit; show them you've seen everything, in your mind's eye, while they have been, in vain, puzzling their brains about the insufficiency of proof, and the Lord knows what besides."

These words sank deep into the mind of the witness. The room spun round like a large top before him; he felt bold as a lion,

confident as a conqueror; he forgot all but the vacant seat that was awaiting him on yonder Bench, and saw no difficulty in reaching it at a single stride. He felt, in fact, no doubt whatever of the prisoner's guilt, and he proceeded, therefore, at once to prove it.

"In the first place, then," commenced he, "it is quite certain that the unfortunate Wildman has disappeared. What has become of him? If his body were above ground, it would have been discovered, long ere this. As he is, then, not above, he must be below the ground, and that leads, at once, to the certainty of his having been murdered. But by whom? that is the question, as Hamlet says. Now, we know that, in this secluded district, there can be no strangers among us, without their presence being observed by some one. But nobody has seen a stranger in the neighbourhood for weeks. The murder, then, must have been committed by one of ourselves, and there is but one man capable of the deed."

Ramsay felt that this counsel-like inculpation of himself was neither proper to be listened to by the bench, nor sufficiently without the force of logical probability, to be altogether safe as regarded him; yet, if he objected to the remarks of the vain, random-witted speaker, he could hardly fail to arouse new suspicions in the public mind. When, therefore, the chairman reminded the witness that he was passing the narrow, rigid bounds of legal evidence, the prisoner interrupted, and begged the magistrates to hear out the harrangue of his conceited accuser.

"Really," pursued Frankum, "the present matter is one deeply affecting landlords, since, if our tenants are not safe, in returning from their markets, it is a proof that we have failed in securing to them that complete protection which they have a right to expect from us."

In pronouncing these patriotic words, with great emphasis, the witness glanced towards his abettor, the clerk, who nodded his head, in

in a manner of thorough approval of the sentiment.

The speaker was proceeding to add, that "it was perfectly well known with what anxiety Major Grimshaw and himself watched over the interests of their tenantry," when the Rev. Mr. Fallow, wearied and disgusted with a string of such impertinent and ill-timed remarks, started up, erect in his chair, with the hope of at last recalling the witness, and the Bench, to something like a more becoming sense of legal propriety.

"I never, in the course of my long experience as a magistrate," said he, "heard anything at all equal to this ill-placed and irrelevant discourse. Are my brethren and I to be lectured, especially at this time, respecting our duties as landlords?"

"I think, Mr. Fallow, if you will permit me to say so," returned Frankum, "that you can hardly be expected to estimate the due importance of the considerations I have ven-

tured to express, inasmuch as, I believe, the only sort of tenantry of which you ever knew anything consists of the successive generations of jackdaws which have inhabited the old tower of the little church in which you officiate."

"This is contempt of court, sir, and I shall call on my friend, Major Grimshaw, to commit you, if you use one more impertinent word."

"Commit me, Mr. Fallow?"

"Indeed, Major," added the latter magistrate, "I must insist on my position, and call on you to protect the Bench from insult."

But Major Grimshaw, as usual, on an official emergency, was greatly confused as to how he should act, under the painful circumstances. The altercation had gone, suddenly, beyond a joke; the crowd began to laugh, the clerk got alarmed at his work, and Mr. Maitland coloured with indignation.

As for Frankum, he was far too excited to

comprehend the importance and gravity of the crisis he had provoked, and, forthwith, he carried it to its height by exclaiming, in a voice quite audible in every part of the room:

"Ay, ay, Mr. Black Coat, take care; the time is coming when, instead of being committed for contempt of the Bench, I shall obtain a seat upon it."

"Sir, sir!" thundered Mr. Maitland, now really angry at the scene of foolery, "this is infamous, and, unless you apologise, whatever honours you may be destined to receive in the future, you shall find your way to the House of Correction now. My dear Fallow, leave this fellow to me. Now, sir, what evidence have you to give, not what opinions have you to express, in regard to this inquiry?"

This unmistakeable language, uttered in accents of the deepest severity, dashed poor Frankum, in an instant, from the summit to the very base of the little pedestal of approach-

ing fame on which he had just, so proudly and fondly, erected himself.

"'Pon my honour, as a gentleman," he began, "if I have said anything improper—"

"We'll hear your apologies by and bye, sir," said the venerable magistrate, "at present, have the goodness to inform us, in the fewest words, what you know of this suspected murder."

The witness then briefly related how he had been aroused from his slumbers in the middle of the night on which Wildman was lost; how he had repaired to the farm, met there a crowd of frightened villagers, and volunteered to lead them on an expedition of discovery, along the highway toward the market town; and how, when they arrived at a certain point, they found the wife of the supposed deceased, the shepherd's dog, and a strange man in the road; the woman in a state of insensibility, leaning against the hedge, and the stranger lying in

the ditch, overpowered by liquor. He added, that on revisiting the spot, on the following morning, in company with other persons, they had distinguished, at only a very few yards distance from it, clear marks of some very recent scuffle, between whom, it was, of course, impossible to say, but it appeared certain that a horse had been engaged in it, and the confused traces of the animal's feet strongly agreed with the well-known hoof mark of the mare "Speed."

"Indeed!" observed the old magistrate, "that sounds important. And where is the man who was found drunk, on that night?"

The prisoner's countenance was thought by many to look more anxious than it had yet done, during his examination; but when the magistrates were informed, by half-a-dozen different persons, that the stranger had not been seen since the time when he was left, tipsy, in the stable at the farm, it again regained its former composed aspect.

"I must have that man found," said Mr. Maitland.

"He has been sought for in vain," was the reply. "No one in the neighbourhood knows who he was. None of the persons who conveyed him to the farm, had ever seen him before."

The female, who had in the early part of the examination interrupted the proceedings, here again forced her way to the front of the table, and said in a firm voice—

"I know and can tell who that man was."

"Gentlemen," said Ramsay, addressing the magistrates, "you cannot listen to that woman's tales; she is crazy."

"Not so crazy as you hope, Isaac," said the woman, looking the prisoner in the face and laughing hysterically.

"What is your name my good woman?" demanded the magistrate.

"Katherine Morrison."

"She is always known in the neighbour-

hood," whispered the clerk to Mr. Maitland, "as 'crazy Kate,' of Knowle Wood, near poor Wildman's farm."

"Crazy or not," said the magistrate, "we shall receive her evidence."

The crowd became intensely interested.

"Now, my good woman, what more have you to tell us? Who was the man that was found in the highway, the night Wildman disappeared?"

"That question I could, but may not, answer. No, no, Isaac," said she, again looking at the prisoner, and smiling at him, with a strangely significant expression, "there are only two of us who know him, are there my sweet heart?" The last word was spoken with singular emphasis and point.

"I insist upon your telling us, who was the man in question!" exclaimed the magistrate.

"You may insist as long as you like, but you can't make me speak, for all that!"

"We shall commit you to prison."

"With all my heart; you'll only remove me from the old wood, that's in the valley, home yonder."

The baffled magistrates and their clerk conferred together, for some seconds, across the table, in whispers, at the end of which the chairman announced that the further examination must be adjourned to a future day. The crowd dispersed, and Ramsay was led back to his prison.

CHAPTER IV.

The garlands, the rose odours, and the flowers—
The sparkling eyes, and flashing ornaments—
————————————the thin robes,
Floating like light clouds 'twixt our gaze and heaven;
The many twinkling feet so small and sylph-like.
Marino Faliero.

"WELL, Brooks, how is the brown horse, this morning?"

"Why, sir, he moves quite brisk again, but the Farrier says he must not be worked for a

fortnight yet, or the lameness will return upon him, worse than ever it was."

"Ah! Thompson is a clever fellow in his business, and has never, yet, either lost me a nag, or sent me in a light bill. How are the puppies?"

"They are growing nicely, sir, and promise to be very handsome."

"Is my double barrel in prime condition, Brooks? I may want it next week; at least I am expecting an invitation into Shropshire, in a short time."

"She's as clean and clear as a new pipe, sir, I had her out but yesterday."

"That'll do; bring round the cab in an hour from this. Now off and close the door —Stay, Brooks, I have changed my mind— bring it to the door in half-an-hour, my aunt luncheons early, and is as punctual as the Duke of Wellington."

This short conversation took place in

London, in the private apartment of a fashionable young man, about fifteen years after the events of the last chapter had taken place.

The reader will have easily perceived that this person was a sportsman of some kind, but how or to what extent he needs not to be, at present, further informed.

The young man had nothing whatever particular in his personal appearance. He was tall, well built, and ordinarily good looking, that is he had regular features and a clear, healthy complexion, as if, though a resident in Town, he had opportunities of breathing a considerable quantity of country air. While addressing his servant, he had a fencing mask over his face, a foil in his hand and his coat off, displaying his shirt sleeves. There was a third person in the room, almost similarly dressed.

As soon as the door closed, the two fencers again betook themselves to their manly exer-

cise, and made many brilliant passes on each side.

"That will do, Harry," said he whom we have described, laying aside his foil and unbuttoning the strap of his vizor; "by the time I have arranged my toilette, the cab will be here. Do you think we improve?"

"No doubt of it, *mon ami.* How do you get on with the pistol?"

"I hit three out of the five crown pieces this morning, and Brooks took the spoilt coin to sell as old silver, so that I have no doubt he keeps a very accurate diary of my duellistic progress."

"Ah, Ernest, I am sadly afraid you will never really employ your dexterity in the noble arts of slaying, after all your labour to acquire them. Having once reached the desirable point of knowing, for a certainty, that your adversary's life is at your disposal, I am quite sure you will be a very safe fellow for any fool hardy puppy to insult."

"What, you think that however scientific I may become, with sword and pistol, courage is a thing beyond the reach of art?"

"Indeed, I mean nothing of the sort; all I wish to convey is the simple fact that, I know very well, the feeling that you have the power to injure will most effectually prevent your using it. The cur, Ernest, snaps at the strong mastiff with complete impunity, and the cowardly little brute sneaks for shelter under the very nobility which he impudently braves."

"Well, well, Harry, I must be off, or I shall pay dearly for allowing my vanity to be tickled with these friendly compliments to my generosity, by suffering the full brunt of my noble relative's ire, excited by my late arrival at luncheon."

The young men left the room, and soon after Ernest de Lisle stepped into his dashing cab, which went spinning, with the speed of lightning, and the round, close, sound of a humming

top, down the paved and comparatively silent street, until it emerged into a busier thoroughfare; then, turning westward, the driver passed the park gates at the top of Oxford Street, skirting the park now white with the misty rain of a November day, and stopped before one of the largest houses in Hyde Park Gardens. Brooks, who had all the way along swayed behind the springy vehicle with the easy grace of a tight rope dancer, darted to the head of the spirited animal which drew it, and his master, hastily throwing aside the silver mounted whip and white reins, was quickly in the elegant drawing room of his aunt, the Countess of Lynden.

"This is very good of you, Ernest; I really think you are growing punctual. An unpleasant day, and I would not have asked you to come out in such weather, but that I wanted to speak with you a little, regarding this evening."

"The luncheon is on the table," said a tall, well-powdered footman with a livery in perfect taste, entering the room at the moment.

De Lisle gave his arm to the Countess or rather she took it, and they descended to the dining-room. They were quite alone, as the servant was told his further attendance, at present, was not required.

"My dear aunt, let me help you to a wing of this cold grouse?"

"No, my love, thank you, I have something far better, for my purpose, under this cover."

"Indeed! it smells uncommonly like rump steak," said the young man; "but what *recherché* dish is it you have?" he added.

The Countess placed her white hand upon the richly embossed cover, as she replied:

"When you are preparing yourself for a long day on the fatiguing Moors of Scotland, dear Ernest, what do you generally take for breakfast?"

"Many good things, Lady Lynden; Scotch

dishes of all kinds; Canterbury brawn; Westphalia hams; and lastly perhaps, though not least, rump steak lightly done."

"That," said the Countess smiling, "brings us to the very subject which induced me to ask your presence here to-day. Though I am not, as you know, a large eater, I am yet obliged to prepare myself for the campaign of fashion as systematically as you prepare for grouse shooting. My card basket, up stairs, is literally groaning with the weight of its contents; invitations are so numerous that they take up fully half an hour of my time, every morning, merely to glance at them. I, really, do not accept more than about one in every ten, and yet I need a secretary to undertake the labour of writing. This evening, I have a large party here, and another to attend in Belgrave Square. Nothing but this arrangement will enable me to keep pace with the world. Now, my dear nephew, this is an important secret in my movements which it was necessary

for me to communicate to you, and therefore I trust to you to be here in good time this evening, and to act as my Lieutenant, with tact and judgment."

"You may infallibly count on me, dear aunt; and now good morning. We shall, at all events, meet again to-morrow."

The footman beckoned the cab, which had been driving up and down, to approach; De Lisle jumped lightly into it, Brooks swung himself into his place behind, and the vehicle rolled away, in the direction of town. When it again halted, it was in front of the Carlton Club House. The young fashionable alighted, and entered the magnificent rooms, where he encountered the usual number of loungers by whom they are occupied. Having glanced at the morning papers, and chatted with a few acquaintances, he was crossing the large entrance hall, to regain his cab, when he met an old friend. This person was Sir Stephen Brydges, a middle aged, *roué* baronet, and the

Tory member of Parliament for the little corrupt borough of ——, in Devonshire, better known to the reader as the market town so frequently alluded to in our opening chapters.

The said borough had been, almost ever since it had first obtained its privilege of sending two representatives into the House, a victim to the unaccountable dearth of legislative talent belonging to its picturesque and charming neighbourhood. Among the generations of the squirearchy, who had lived and died in that part of the country, for the last century and a half, not more than about two or three men had been found, by the constituency of —— possessing even the small share of brains necessary for a member of Parliament. The borough had, consequently, been long dependent on the rest of the kingdom for its brace of representatives; and thus thrown within the power of a few political schemers, it generally could boast of the most disreputable, bankrupt, and even black-legged legislators that

were sent into the House.* At last, the place arrived at a point of bribing depravity, and political infamy at which it discovered the advantage of openly offering at least one of its seats, regularly, for sale to the highest bidder, at every new election.

In the possession, however, for one of its members, of the Baronet to whom the reader has just been introduced, the borough was in a happier and more honourable condition, in the eyes of the world, than it had been for very many years. Sir Stephen Brydges was a gay man about town; living, it is true, a good deal upon his wits, in a manner that but few of his friends could clearly explain; yet he was entirely innocent of any known crimes of enormity; he paid his way in London, and his election debts in the country; and, moreover, in the course of the eight years he had held his seat, he had made, at least, half a dozen tolerably im-

* This just reproach no longer exists. The borough of —— has now too intelligent members of native growth.

portant and effective speeches, in favour of the rights and interests of his constituents.

"Ah, how do you do?" said the M.P., addressing De Lisle; "I have not seen you since Parliament opened."

"Had I, Sir Stephen, made the observation to you there would have been far more point in it."

"How, my good fellow—what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you have, lately, become so active a member of the House that you have quite deserted all your old haunts. The club, the betting room, the shooting gallery, balls, dinners, all feel the want of your accustomed presence, my dear Brydges."

"True; I am working hard, De Lisle, and not before it is high time. I have spoken three times in a set, out and out speech, within the last month, without receiving a single look of impatience from the Honorable the Speaker—who, by the bye, knows very well that I never trouble him except on

emergencies. When I seek his eye, he is aware that one of my constituents of importance is either in the gallery or the body of the House, and that, therefore, I dare not remain silent. If I am so, the constituent feels himself to be nobody, and is quite sure to resent on me the outrage on his dignity; while, on the other hand, while I am on my legs, addressing the chair, he feels that every body is looking at him as the giver of all parliamentary good, in having been chiefly instrumental in securing me my present seat. Recently, not only have I made long speeches, but I have asked innumerable questions; and, without inordinate egotism, I may boast of having impeded a tolerable amount of the Nation's business; but the House understands my motives and fully accepts my pertinacity, I had almost said my pugnacity, as the sure fore-runner of an approaching general election. Perhaps you do not yet know, De Lisle, that the most approved way for a member to turn his seat in Parliament into a life annuity is for him to tease the

House as little as possible generally, and to display a statesman-like discretion, by resuming his activity, and redeeming his electioneering pledges on certain inevitable and painful occasions."

"You expect an election, Sir Stephen?"

"I fear an election, De Lisle."

"Fear, my dear sir, your seat is an inalienable hereditament, is it not?"

"Not exactly; times have changed. The country gentleman are pressed hard by the classes beneath them, and they waver. Besides that, those in power have kept them, for for a long period, in the back-ground, by making them of little political account. A change must now take place in our tactics, or we shall lose ourselves by losing them. They must be conciliated, encouraged, petted, blinded, and again led."

"How do you propose to carry on this new courtship to their affections?"

"Oh, the thing is easily managed; indeed

it is already begun, in many quarters. The nobility are sending invitations innumerable into the country, and, in a week more, all their houses will be open for the reception of, at least, one half the squirearchy of the Kingdom; further, the Squires will have *carte blanche* given them to drag to town after them all the most important even of the trading voters, in their localities. The streets are, even now, crowded with an impeding throng of old, lumbering, country, family coaches that have not been in the habit of quitting their sheds, except on Sundays to go to church, for the last twenty years of their slow, crazy existence."

"Well, Sir Stephen, their presence will make a capital town season for us."

"Which do you mean, the family coaches or their owners?"

"Either, both, and all; we shall, for a time, at least, have dinner parties enlivened by a new set of butts, on whom the so long ridiculed

among us will, themselves, turn ridiculer; and the present horrible insipidity of Drawing-rooms will be, somewhat, relieved by the piquancy afforded by the presence, there, of little country girls, and their elderly protectresses, all of whom will remind us of the page of fiction, read long ago, or the golden age of rural simplicity, now fast growing every whit as fabulous."

"You are, then, De Lisle, among those philosophers who believe that pleasure would grow into an affliction, if not at times varied by a dash of pain?"

"Perhaps I am."

"Well, then, will you accompany me, this evening, to old Lord ———'s; I have promised to dine there with one of the most important, because the most influential of my constituents? His Lordship who never stands on ceremony, has always room at his table for an extra half-dozen guests, and will be delighted to have your assistance in entertaining our

friend Major Grimshaw, of Ackworth Hall, Devonshire."

"Thank you; I should be delighted to meet the Major, but my aunt gives a grand rout this evening, and I have promised to be there early. By the bye, Sir Stephen, is the gallant officer a bachelor, or has he his family with him in town?"

"He has a wife and two daughters."

"Excellent; what do you say, after your dinner party, to bringing your friend and his three dependencies to us?"

"I should like nothing better; indeed, I am half pledged to get them a few introductions. But Lady Lynden, my good friend? she hates the very name of a 'Squire."

"Never fear my aunt's prejudices, Brydges; I'll manage all that. I have plenary powers under her roof, this evening; I shall expect you; good morning."

They shook hands and parted.

Soon after ten o'clock, in the evening of the

day on which this conversation had taken place, close carriages, with flaming lamps, and powdered coachmen, began to set down elegantly dressed women, and aristocratic elderly gentlemen, at the illuminated mansion of the Countess of Lynden, in Hyde Park Gardens. Well equipped cabs, whirled up to the kerbstone by high trotting horses, with jingling harness and steaming nostrils, arrived later, and cast forth men of younger age and more dashing exteriors. All was done rapidly, swiftly, outside the Countess's, yet quietly and in order, as though the reception of company there, was no new thing.

Within that fashionable, ultra West-end abode, everything wore an air of subdued, chastened brilliancy, and solid yet piquant splendour, well becoming the known taste of the occupier. Even the lofty, marble paved entrance hall, delicately perfumed with the scent of the rarest exotics, and flooded with a tide of high, quiet light, shed abroad through

the softening medium of ground glass, was a delightful place. Here were well-trained footmen, and soft stepped, obsequious waiting-women, ready to attend upon the visitors; and from this meet spot emanated the first loud and distinct syllabling of high and noble names, which a somewhat long series of varied echoes seemed, constantly, throughout the night, either carrying up or down the broad, carpeted staircase. Above, gay music was sounding, and to its distant vibrations, the air, beneath, gently pulsated, as though the spirit of joy pervaded all the building. Now and then, the faint, silky, rumbling noise caused by the feet of innumerable dancers appeared to concentrate and thicken overhead, and the glasses of the hanging lamps would chatter, and the lights within them waver; but it was only for an instant, and then the crowd of feet seemed to recede, as quietly as the ebbing wave, upon the smooth, bright sand of the sea beach.

The scene in Lady Lynden's drawing-rooms, that evening, was one of finished taste and brilliancy. The white, enamelled walls, divided into panels, and painted in charming arabesque: the lustrous chandeliers, pendant from the elevated, beautifully ornamented ceilings; the large mirrors, copying reality, and giving to it feigned immensity; the choice bronzes and statuettes of Italy; the porphyry vases and marble pedestals; the gilded furniture, costly cabinets, and open conservatories, pouring coolness and fragrance among the glittering throng now assembled, all combined to form a scene of unrivaled splendour, luxury, and elegance.

Amid that gay and moving company, one figure appears to be gifted with the convenient attribute of easy and graceful ubiquity—never hurried, yet always shifting, now dispersing the gathering mists of *ennui* or of dulness at this point, now adding silver to the subdued laughter to be heard at that; there, its approach makes a pause in the long-winded narrative of

a conversational bore, and here, its presence feathers the shafts of wit, and gives a graceful playfulness to the vein of satire. Cold, ugly, rugged clusters of men separate at the magician-like accents of the Countess of Lynden; their component parts acting on the principle of mutual repulsion, and flying off to form new affinities, with other elements, in the throng around them. Her penetrating spirit is in the music, the dance, the conversation, and the feelings of all present; her genius, in short, is as much felt, in every region of her fashionable apartments, as that of a great general is at all points of a battle.

The Countess was a woman fast nearing fifty, although her appearance was much younger; and her spirit, in reality, was just ten years distant from that grey dawn of age. Her figure was above the middle height of her sex, erect, and finely rounded; and she still walked with the easy grace and firmness of youth. Her complexion,

inclining to fair, was clear and smooth; when heightened by warmth, it was even brilliant. Her features were high and regular; her white forehead, appearing between the dark bands of her hair, was commanding; her eyes were grey and somewhat severe, but softened in their expression, by the mild,almond-formed lids, and long, dark lashes, which protected them. The mouth was still perfect in its outline, and the white teeth unimpaired and even; the vermillion of other days had, however, somewhat paled on the lips; and the chin, still round and dimpled in front, had become slightly thickened beneath. On the present occasion, she appeared in a rich dress of pale blue satin, point lace and diamonds—and the same costly jewels, combined with French blonde and Marabout feathers, formed a head dress of unimpeachable design, and flowing artistical effect. A glittering bracelet displayed to advantage her still white and rounded arm, and her small,

soft hands were so exquisitely, nay, so almost fastidiously gloved, that they appeared as if encased in white enamel.

Merrily the dancing continued—and the rooms grew every minute more densely crowded, when, at about midnight, Lady Lynden, having staid long enough to receive most of her guests, and seeing her nephew now in full authority among them, quietly glided from the scene, entered the carriage which awaited her at the door, and drove off, unobserved, to join another assembly, in Belgrave Square; after which she intended, if possible, to pass a concluding half-hour at the house of a friend, in the aristocratic quarter of May Fair, and then wend her way home.

Whilst things were in this position, fresh visitors were painfully struggling to force their way towards a particular spot, where Ernest De Lisle was to be seen giving life to the conversation of a group of bright eyed, elegantly dressed girls. The singling out of persons to

become the especial objects of remark is, certainly, not an authorized custom in good society, where, in order to escape singularity, everything is trimmed and pared down into the smooth level of a piece of well kept turf; but there was that about the new comers which led, involuntarily, to the violation of this rule. Many eyes were turned towards them; many observations called forth, by their appearance, as they proceeded up the large room.

"Do look, Mr. De Lisle," said one of the prettiest of the girls just alluded to, "who is that tall, feminine singularity, leaning on the arm of Sir Stephen Brydges?"

The young man, at once, recollected his arrangement with the Baronet, and advanced to meet him and those whom he had undertaken to introduce, that evening, at the Countess's.

"How do you do, again, De Lisle. You have plenty of your friends here to-night," observed the member for —— "Mrs. Grimshaw, allow me to introduce you to my friend

Mr. De Lisle, the nephew of our kind hostess, Lady Lynden;" then turning half round, he added "and young ladies permit me to do the same to you. De Lisle, these are the daughters of my valued friend, Major Grimshaw."

Ernest and the Major saved the speaker the trouble of a further introduction, by at once bowing to each other.

A few lines descriptive of this country family are, perhaps, necessary, before we continue our narrative.

To the male head of it the reader has been already introduced, when he sat as chairman of the Bench of Magistrates, in a former chapter, and we need, now, in no wise either add to or take from the portrait there drawn of him, except simply to remark that the pepper and salt colored coat and the waistcoat with the stand up collar were ,appropriately, replaced by a plain, yet sufficiently modern evening dress.

Mrs. Grimshaw was a person whose precise age was not easily guessed, from her appearance. Marriage, which in her case had arrived somewhat late, had not, entirely, sweetened that skin of sourness which grows over the gentleness of womanhood left too long unmated.

She was a mother with no perceptible attributes of maternity, about her. One would have supposed, to see her, that her children must have been brought up by hand, or sent to wet-nurses, so little did she appear ever to have known of "the milk of human kindness."

She was a tall, loose jointed, long legged, long armed, skinny fingered, crane necked woman, with a sallow complexion, greenish eyes, straight thin nose, long white teeth, and a very crabbed expression about the corners of her mouth, which strongly inclined downwards. Her chin was a perfect point; and she bore herself aloft with a sort of ricketty, tumble-down erectness of carriage. Her dress became

her as well as anything in tolerable good taste could do. She wore an amber colored satin gown, trimmed with black lace and ornamented by large pearls. The front of her head was surmounted by a broad pearl tiara, from which fell, behind, towards the shoulders, a mixture of gold fringe and black lace—and before, over her hollow cheeks, a single curl, on each side, that seemed stolen from the scanty bands of dry, brown hair, stiffly cemented to the forehead.

The two daughters of this lady are easily described. The eldest of them was an exact counterpart of her mother, without the excuse of advancing age. She looked haughty and imperious, with a disproportionately long neck and a small, slow turning head, like a giraffe. The younger sister was a quiet girl, shorter in stature, with long ringlets, pale face and a white dress, the ditto of that worn by her sister.

In far less time than we have taken to complete these hasty sketches, the young ladies, through the exertions of Sir Stephen Brydges and Ernest de Lisle, were provided with partners for the dance, and the latter then offering his arm to Mrs. Grimshaw they moved off into another part of the room, leaving the magistrate and the borough member to make their own comments on the gay scene which surrounded them.

The deputed substitute of Lady Lynden was really a kind hearted fellow, and did all in his power to entertain his newly made acquaintance, in their short promenade. In ten minutes, he pointed out to her the most distinguished of his aunt's guests, to many of whom he introduced her; complimented her on the personal appearance of her daughters; made dexterous allusions to County matters in Devonshire, and, finally, returned her with a sweetened temper and (a great deal to say considering the crammed state of the rooms) un-

injured toilette to the protection of the gallant major. It will be easily imagined, that this polite attention on the part of De Lisle, at once, nipped in the bud many a meditated quiz upon the strangers, and it was, accordingly, soon settled, by those who troubled themselves to think at all about the matter, that though, certainly, most eccentric in their appearance and manner they were, probably, exceedingly nice people. In the next waltz, the good looking host of the evening waltzed with Miss Grimshaw and, later, he danced, in a quadrille, with her sister.

Never had the Grimshaw's enjoyed a party so much in their lives, and yet they had been to at least half a dozen county balls.

"Major," said the magistrate's lady to him in a low but earnest voice. "Mr. De Lisle is the nicest young man that, I think, I have ever met. He is a sportsman, too, I find; you must invite him down to visit us, at Ackworth Hall."

"Very well, I'll write to him when we get home, my dear."

"Indeed you will do no such thing, Major Grimshaw; you'll have the goodness to invite him personally. It is that foolish dislike of hearing your own voice which enables Mr. Fallow to get before you, on the Bench, and which may yet lose Julia and Isabel advantageous husbands. What is either a magistrate or a father without a tongue in his head?"

"I'll speak to him, my dear, I'll speak to him, as soon as I know him better."

A stout, apoplectic old lady, to whom Mrs. Grimshaw had been introduced by De Lisle, here bore down, in a gale of rustling silk, and addressed the former:

"The crowd is, happily, lessening Mrs. Grimshaw; I have been a close prisoner, in a warm corner, for the last three quarters of an hour, and am now just come out, for a little wholesome exercise. But what a charming evening!"

The feeling of awkwardness, badly concealed by an exterior of pride, with which Mrs. Grimshaw had felt herself oppressed on entering the room, was fast giving place to one of greater confidence and comfort; she fancied her manners were already rapidly assimilating to those of the persons around her, and the thought flattered her vanity and increased her good humour; she felt elevated and excited; her face copied the smiles she saw on other countenances, while her tongue parroted the prevailing talkativeness. Never before, had Major Grimshaw and the two girls been addressed by her with so much ease and vivacity. If a passer by, did but brush the hem of Mrs. Grimshaw's garment, she smiled the most gracious forgiveness of the accident, and an "I beg your pardon," was seized on, by her, as the most agreeable excuse for saying a hundred reassuring and indulgent things, in return. When, therefore, she was accosted by her new acquaintance, the common-place re-

marks were reciprocated with a warmth and cordiality of manner that, not a little, surprised the maker of them:

"Yes, a most delightful evening; Lady Lynden, certainly, beats us all. But how delighted I am, my dear madam, that fortune has released you from your corner and thrown you here. Permit me to introduce Major Grimshaw to you."

The apoplectic lady exaggerated the difficulty of her respiration by looking up in the face of the tall major, and bowing an acknowledgment of the unexpected honor.

"And my daughter Julia."

The bow was, of course, repeated.

"And my youngest daughter, Isabel."

The old lady again bent her fat throat, and seemed half suffocated with her reiterated exertions. She fully expected, next, to be introduced to two or three tall sons, and heartily thanked her stars, when she found herself mistaken.

"This evening," pursued Mrs. Grimshaw, "strongly reminds me of one in Devonshire, at which Lady Malden, Lady Dennis, and myself acted as patronesses; our arrangements were the theme of all present, and I really am afraid to say how many complimentary letters of thanks I, afterwards, received."

"Indeed, ma'am," was the reply; "well for my part I have a horror of the very name of a county ball, and I would as soon walk through Cheapside as enter such a dangerous crowd."

"Certainly, certainly, but as patronesses, you know, we could keep aloof from what I would call the mob."

"Ah, that was fortunate; I went to one once, but did not fare so well. Good evening, Mrs. Grimshaw," and the speaker was turning away to leave the room:

"We shall take our departure, too, as soon as we have spoken to Lady Lynden. Where can she be? we have not seen her, yet."

"Then you may order your carriage, at once; the Countess is at a large party, in Belgrave Square."

And, having made the astounding remark, this portly star of fashion moved away from her new acquaintance.

Mrs. Grimshaw had now full time to reflect on all she had seen and that was still passing around her. In what, then, did the rumoured superiority of fashionable taste exhibited by Lady Lynden, in her parties, consist? Her rooms were of ordinary size and form; there was no single ornament, contained in them, that stood out prominently from the rest, either by its novelty, or peculiar beauty; the furniture, taken in connection with all which surrounded it, was not conspicuous, though, when examined piece by piece, each article was of exquisite and finished design, as well as make; the guests were amiable, affable sort of persons, quiet in their enjoyments, subdued in their mirth, appearing all upon the most easy footing of

social equality, without perceptible grades or distinctions among them; there seemed to be no great man or great lady, there, in whose hands, it was pretty clear, were held the destinies of a county, or the interests of a borough-town; on the other hand there were no little people that might be either snubbed or patronized, and compelled to appear pleased, whichever way they were served; the men's dresses could not have greatly exceeded in cost the very simple one worn by the Major, nor did those of the women far, if at all, excel her own. Minute analysis reduced all to commonplace; but, then, when the investigating process was concluded, the detached parts, again, took their places in the harmonious whole, and that whole still produced its former illusion of unusual elegance, refinement, and high taste.

After all, however, the most remarkable circumstance of the evening, to her, was the strange invisibility of the Countess of Lynden, especially when taken in connection with the

explanation she had just heard of the Countess having gone off to a party in Belgrave Square The novelty and boldness of this fashionable tactic appeared to solve many of the doubts and difficulties by which Mrs. Grimshaw found the earlier stages of her present inquiry beset. Her mind, therefore, at once, regained its wonted composure, pointed out to her new conquests over the existing dreariness of country manners, and bade her hasten back to Ackworth Hall and there unfurl the glorious banner of fashionable improvement, to the astonished eyes of a whole county of barbarous provincials.

"Well, Mrs. Grimshaw," said Ernest De Lisle, coming up and speaking just as these reflections were concluded, "I hope you have passed an agreeable evening! Both your daughters are most indefatigable waltzers, but acknowledge we have tired them out, at last. Major, I fear, however, these town routs are dull affairs for you?"

In fact, the Major had remained in one corner of the room, nearly the whole evening, satisfying himself with a very scrap-like conversation, held periodically with his friend Sir Stephen Brydges, and one or two others, to whom he had been introduced, as often as they could make it convenient to return to him. The chairman of the Bench of Magistrates, however, assured De Lisle that he had not found the evening, by any means, a dull affair. How should he have felt it so, who never knew what it was to be otherwise than mentally dull himself?

The company were now rapidly departing; the rooms were getting empty, and the few dancers who still pursued their amusement had plenty of scope for the free exercise of their art. "Lady ——'s carriage," "Lord ——'s carriage," "Sir Henry Maxwell's cab," and a variety of similar announcements were perpetually resounding up the grand staircase, and the sound of departing vehicles, without,

was incessant. The carriage of Mrs. Grimshaw came at last, and having said good night to their young host, who had won for himself golden opinions in their esteem, the Major, his wife and daughters, and Sir Stephen Brydges took their departure, also. The Grimshaws were to drop the member at his abode, in Piccadilly, and then return to their hotel, which was in the same quarter.

CHAPTER V.

Yet not my own; but likely so to prove,
Though but the pledge of an unlawful love.
Bloomfield.

On the following morning, the Grimshaws came late to the breakfast table, at their hotel. The Major, acting according to country habits, arose, it is true, at a tolerably early hour, and descended to the sitting-room, where he found things all in most uncomfortable and cheerless disorder. The housemaid had just been sweeping the carpet, and the dust raised by her broom

had not thoroughly subsided. She was now on her knees, in the act of lighting the fire; the chimney, not yet warmed, was pouring out volumes of heavy smoke, into the sombre apartment; the brass fender stood in the middle of the floor, and a couple of active waiters, with their white napkins under their arms, peeped in, every now and then, in order to learn when they might commence their brightening operations of dusting furniture, polishing pier glasses, setting tables, and laying the breakfast. The magistrate saw, clearly, that he was regarded by everybody as a person in the way. The housemaid said it was a beautiful morning for London, out of doors; one of the waiters respectfully observed, that most country gentlemen who came to the house, frequently made it a practice to take a stroll out, before breakfast, into the streets, and the other coming in soon afterwards, remarked that perhaps the Major would like to look into the adjoining mews, and see if his travelling carriage had

been properly attended to, since the arrival of the family in town. Grimshaw took the hints, and, putting on his hat, he sallied forth from the hotel.

He had, of course, been in London many times before, still he was a perfect stranger to the localities of town, with the exception of a few of the main streets. On, however, he walked, and soon found himself in Oxford Street, nearly at the point where Bond Street enters it. Turning to the right, he passed the Circus, and thence, still proceeding eastward, speedily reached Poland Street, down which he continued his way. In a short time, the streets grew narrower and more numerous, bending here and branching there, and forming altogether such a confusion of passages, that the Major fairly lost himself among them. Which was east, or which west, it was impossible for him even to guess.

"Dear me," thought he to himself, "I shall not be back in time for breakfast; and my wife

and daughters have made me promise to go out shopping with them, too:" and this thought quickened his pace, without, at all, lessening his difficulties.

The appearance of an old gentleman, walking in a great hurry, dressed as a countryman, talking anxiously to himself, and staring into every little court which he passed by, was not long in fixing attention. A few big, idle, boys, who were lounging at the street corners, fixed upon him as an easy prey, and consequently he was soon, unconsciously, attended by a suite of pick-pockets, keeping at a respectful distance behind him, in the hope that his curiosity would be, by and bye, arrested by a book-stall or a print-seller's window. He would have taken a cab and returned, at once, to the hotel, but not one could he meet with in such a neighbourhood. At length, after puzzling himself, in vain, for above half an hour, in the course of which he perpetually found himself returning to the same points

from which he had not long before set out, he arrived at the opening of rather a broad street, and looking up at the nearest corner he came to, he read the words "Marlborough-street," written thereon. On the opposite side of the way, a number of policemen were standing before an open door, and Major Grimshaw, crossing over to them, inquired politely what was going on there. The reply was, that it was the police-court of the district, and that the magistrate was then sitting. Now Grimshaw was not exactly what is appropriately termed a thin skinned person, still he dreaded returning to his family and accounting for his long absence by acknowledging that he had lost his way; for, while at home, it had been an old boast of his that, perhaps, no country gentleman knew London so well as he did. At once, therefore, he saw a capital excuse to give, on returning to breakfast, so he walked straight through the busy passage of the office, up the narrow stairs, and entered the

room where the magistrate was engaged, in hearing the police cases of the day.

The apartment had almost the appearance of a private parlor, being of very cramped dimensions, and, evidently, not originally constructed for a public purpose of the kind to which it was now devoted. It had no furniture, but a plain, deal rail divided it, transversely, into halves, the upper end being occupied by a raised desk, behind which was placed the magisterial leather-backed chair, and beneath the desk, but rather on one side of it, a round table for the officiating clerk of the court; the remaining space, near to the door, was unoccupied, except by a dense crowd of auditors of all classes, from the respectable tradesman, to the grimy mechanic and the ragged beggar. The magistrate was rather a little man, with grey hair and a sharp penetrating pair of eyes, the acuteness of which he, from time to time, aided by the use of a gold

mounted double eye-glass, which, when not otherwise employed, served as a plaything for its pre-occupied owner, or hung suspended, by means of a black ribbon, upon his loose waistcoat. He sat half on one side, in his comfortable chair, with one knee, generally, crossed at great height upon the other. He spoke with a rapid, decisive utterance, and often, thoughtfully, scrutinized the whole row of white nails on one of his hands, while he rested his head on the other, and energetically bit his under lip. Altogether, this important functionary appeared to be a man of a crustily kind nature, great shrewdness, and polished manners, a little blunted, perhaps, by the daily necessities of his office.

Such were the objects which, now, met the eyes of Major Grimshaw, as he entered the most fashionable of the metropolitan police courts; but matters of greater interest, which certainly not a little astonished him, soon more deeply engaged his attention. Stand-

ing before the magistrate, was a young woman, very good looking, (some might even have thought her pretty) with an infant in her arms, and at no great distance from her, an elderly gentleman, the back aspect of whom exceedingly resembled that of Sir Stephen Brydges.

Grimshaw felt half inclined to turn about and walk out again, but as two or three police officers had civilly made room for him, in front of the crowd of listeners, retreating was not altogether an easy matter at the moment; besides which, his curiosity was, in reality, raised and he therefore thought it best to keep his place, at any rate for a few minutes.

"Well, Sir Stephen," observed the magistrate, "I cannot abandon my original order, in this case, upon the strength merely of your present statement, the complainant having quite satisfied my own mind; and I must, therefore, adhere to my former decision. The arrears must be paid up, at once, and a security given

me for the future monthly payment of the allowance awarded by me."

"Be it so, your worship, I shall comply with your order, without further discussion of the point."

The defendant in the case bowed to the bench, and turned to retire from the court, when he found himself face to face with his friend, the Major. Most men, placed in such a position, would have looked awkward, stammered, and blushed to their ear tips, but Sir Stephen Brydges did nothing of the sort—greeting his political patron with as much cordial surprize of manner as though he had merely, accidentally, met with him in the street.

"How do you do, my dear sir?" said he, putting his arm within that of his friend, and beginning to move towards the door; "I have arranged my little business here, and am now at your disposal until"—(taking out a marvellously small gold watch at which he glanced for

a moment, and then returned it to his pocket —" until three o'clock."

" Stay, stay, Sir Stephen," called out the magistrate; " I must hear something about your security; it will not do for you to trouble me, or one of my brethren, a third time, respecting so trivial a matter. I have no doubt your friend there, whom you have just so fortunately met, will allow you to leave his address with the court; it may be less uncertain than yours."

The speaker had seen, at a glance, through his gold eye-glasses, that the tall, bald-headed friend of the defendant had not only a name to give, but some respectable " local habitation," to which to refer.

" Officer, show the gentlemen into the next room, that they may come to some satisfactory arrangement."

The order was instantly obeyed; and, meanwhile, another light charge was proceeded with by the court.

"My dear friend," said the imperturbable M. P., when alone with his constituent, "you, who have been a soldier, understand these little difficulties into which men, situated as I am, sometimes fall. I can assure you that in this I am merely a scape-goat, burthened with some other person's sins; but London magistrates are so much troubled in this way that they, generally, are full of credulity, and quite inexorable when a gentleman happens to be accused before them, as I now am—in short I must not only pay for the honor of a spurious paternity, but give security that the allowance will be duly made. Under these circumstances, Major, if you will allow me to offer your name as a security, I shall feel exceedingly obliged; and as it is only to satisfy the unnecessary requirements of his worship, in the other room, and you will never be further troubled about the matter, I am sure that I may feel all knowledge of the transaction will be confined

strictly to ourselves—I mean, that you will not suffer it to transpire in any way at home."

The Major would fain have refused compliance, because, although once a soldier, he was now a quiet, country gentleman, the father of two grown up daughters, and a magistrate of his county; and, therefore, he had good reasons for not wishing to be mixed up, in any way, in such a delicate affair. But then the baronet's request appeared such a slight one, to be preferred by an old friend; he was under such an obligation to him for his civility in introducing himself and family to Lady Lynden's, the previous evening; he might really be the victim he represented himself; and, lastly, the Major was such a poor framer of even tolerably good excuses, to avoid doing anything, that he thought he should most effectually emancipate himself from his disagreeable position by amiably consenting to assist Sir Stephen, in the way he desired. With little hesitation, therefore, he

signified his willingness to leave his name and address with the magistrate.

The two friends now re-entered the court, and the baronet, having paid up his arrears, and a note having been made, by the clerk, of the circumstances under which Major Grimshaw, of Ackworth Hall, Devonshire, had become security for Sir Stephen Brydges, M. P. for ——, in the same county, they were permitted to retire, which they accordingly did, after wishing the magistrate a very polite good morning.

When they reached the street, the Major informed Sir Stephen that he had not yet breakfasted, and that his wife and daughters were probably, by that time, in some state of alarm, owing to his lengthened absence; it was, therefore, proposed by the member that the magistrate should take a cab, at the first stand they came to, and hasten to the hotel, Sir Stephen promising to call upon him, in the course of the afternoon.

We began this chapter by saying that the Grimshaws breakfasted very late on the morning following the party, and we now repeat that such was the case. In fact, the head of that interesting family did not arrive at the hotel, after his morning's adventures, before close upon one o'clock in the day; and when he did make his appearance, at last, he found no. 15, first floor sitting-room, in a state of the greatest excitement and alarm. The breakfast was still upon the table untouched, but the coffee, eggs, and rolls, were all quite cold, and those who should have enjoyed them, in proper season, were more dead than alive with fright and long fasting, superadded to the fatigue still remaining, after the labours of the night before.

"Why, Major Grimshaw, where have you been all the morning? I fully expected to see you brought in with a fractured skull or limb, produced by a coach or waggon having driven over you."

"My dearest papa, how naughty of you to alarm us so!"

"Thank God, we see you safe, at last, dear papa!"

Amid these exclamations, from his anxious family, the magistrate felt he might almost as well be back again in the police court, involuntarily helping to clear his friends from their responsibilities, in parenting little people claiming fathers.

Gradually, however, the storm of affection that raged around him, blew over; the waiters provided fresh eggs, coffee, &c., and the little party sat down to their morning's meal.

The Major, in order to restore matters to their former happy state, by rubbing out, if possible, every trace of his recent offence against domestic regularity, looked about for a good topic of conversation, and having first explained where he had been; that he had visited one of the police courts, in company with Sir Stephen Brydges, and forgotten all about his breakfast,

in the deep interest he had taken in the proceedings—(all of which unsatisfactory explanation, Mrs. Grimshaw secretly determined to hear over again, on some more convenient occasion,) he proceeded to advert to what had taken place on the previous evening, at the party of Lady Lynden.

"Well, girls, I hope you don't mean to complain of too little dancing, last night. You hardly let that young man, Mr. De Lisle, out of your hands, the whole evening,"

"Oh, papa, you must not accuse me of monopolizing him, it was Julia to whom he was so particularly attentive, indeed," replied the younger sister.

"Yes, I danced two quadrilles and three waltzes with him," observed the fair Julia, looking quite delighted at the remembrance; "and he is such an agreeable young man; he converses on every subject—fashionable life, painting, music, poetry, botany, politics and sporting."

"And love, I suppose?" added the Major.

"Major Grimshaw! what a very foolish man you are; really, your remarks are enough to destroy the presence of mind of any girl in the world. Never mind, dear Julia; you can leave the table, if you feel uncomfortable."

The worthy magistrate said within himself, that his wife and his colleague Fallow were exactly alike, in the strange views they both took of his conduct; and Julia, who had never in her life known what sensibility of feeling meant, nevertheless, being informed by her mother that she experienced something of the kind now, supposed that she actually did, and she, in consequence, arose from her seat, and went to the window, to recover herself."

"Isabel, my dear," said Mrs. Grimshaw, "do follow your sister, and see if you can be of assistance to her in calming her agitation."

"What has agitated her, mama?"

"What, Isabel! but it is of no use endeavouring to explain it to you—you never will comprehend your sister's acute feelings. I

hope, however, that the dear girl has, at length, found some one who already begins to understand her."

And Mrs. Grimshaw looked pathetically tender towards the part of the room where her favorite daughter was standing, trying to recover herself from a supposed severe attack of sensibility.

"Well, we shall see mama; I am sure I earnestly hope she has."

In the course of these volumes, the reader will have ample opportunities of judging of that question for himself. At present, we shall not wait to see Julia return to her half-finished breakfast, but, at once, lower the curtain of another chapter of our story.

CHAPTER VI.

——————True Gentrie standeth in the trade
Of virtuous life, not in the fleshly line;
For blood is knit, but Gentrie is divine.
Mirror for Magistrates.

Ernest de Lisle and his friend Harry Grey were again engaged with the foils, on the third day after Lady Lynden's rout, when Sir Stephen Brydges entered the apartment.

"Good morning, Brydges; I shall be ready for you in a few minutes; I have ordered the cab to come round," said De Lisle.

"Ah, Sir Stephen," observed the other fencer, after having shaken the baronet familiarly by the hand, "what the deuce were you doing at the Police Court the other morning?"

"Ha, ha, ha! a most awkward little affair indeed, Grey; but it ended in the most fortunate manner possible, for me. Of course, your informant told you all about my security, Major Grimshaw?"

"Yes, I heard it all, I believe."

"Stay, what is all this?" enquired De Lisle.

The member related to him the whole matter and then said, "I think I never acted with more promptness and success, in a dilemma, in my life. By not hesitating to nail my constituent as my bondsman, I carried two points—I saved myself the trouble of seeking any other security, and effectually prevented his ever mentioning the subject to his family or any one else, in the county. Had I not had my wits about me, ministers might have lost my future political support, as I might, at the

next election, have lost my seat for ———, in consequence of my having had thus thrust upon me a new paternal honor. Mrs. Grimshaw, you must know, who completely governs her husband, and who certainly gives me my election, half belongs to the dissenting party, which is a very strong one among the electors of ———; and therefore a tale of scandal, circulated respecting me, would certainly ruin me with her, and she would most likely succeed in unseating me. This very morning, I have received a note from one of the managers of the Tory party, desiring to know from me whether, in the event of an election, I can make sure of keeping my seat for them."

"And what reply shall you give them, Sir Stephen?" enquired the young men.

"That I am sure to do so."

"But how if this Marlborough Street tale should get abroad?"

"Oh, my good friend, Grimshaw, having become bail for me before the magistrates, his

character and my seat must be either lost or preserved together."

"I perceive," remarked Grey, "all things, I believe, are considered fair in elections, as they are said to be in love and war."

"Our friend Brydges, Harry, is only an unprincipled man in words," added De Lisle with emphasis.

At this moment, Brooks was seen to bring the cabriolet to the front door, and the subject was forthwith dropped. In a short time afterwards, Ernest de Lisle and the baronet were driving together towards Hyde Park Gardens. Their conversation soon turned upon the country family.

"I have not, yet, heard your opinion of my friends, the Grimshaws," said the latter.

"Why, they appear very unused to the world, Sir Stephen, but I doubt not they are kind, good people enough, in the main."

"Devilish proud though, when at home,

among those they consider their inferiors, I am told, De Lisle."

"That is the little weakness of their class and hardly the fault of individuals. The modern Squirearchy are not, really, prouder than their predecessors, but their pride is less noble and genial, from being more dissevered from the great characteristics of England, and more bound up with a certain narrow minded selfish view of their place in society. They have, unfortunately, lost the old pride of being rural patriarchs and protectors among their people, and have engrafted upon their manners the sickly, badly copied, refinements and habits of Town life."

"De Lisle, I am a Town tory, and I hate the country 'squires like the most rabid radical living. I would, if I could, even change my politics to get out of their way; as I cannot, I may yet have my revenge on them, and retrieve my fortune by marrying some ill-bred holder of a portion of their wealth. In case of

great need, I think I should prefer such a sacrifice of myself, to the more spirited way of cutting the knot of one's pecuniary difficulties, by discharging a loaded pistol into the roof of one's mouth."

"You are a random talker, Sir Stephen, but I suspect that, at your time of life, you are not quite without meaning in what you say. The Grimshaws, I suppose, are wealthy, are they not?"

"Why do you ask that question, my good fellow?"

"I will be frank, Brydges. How would the major's eldest daughter serve for your self-sacrificial altar?"

"I will be equally frank, De Lisle, and confess to you that I positively shudder at the gloomy, wretched thought; nevertheless, such may be my fate."

"Excuse me, Sir Stephen, but might not the young lady, with all her faults, come to

your aid, at last, and generously refuse to see you throw yourself away, by marrying her?"

"You are quizzing, De Lisle, I am serious; I am yet young enough to play a sure game there, were I to make up my mind to commence it."

"Now, Brydges, you push me further than I intended to go; so far am I from treating this matter lightly, that I am inclined to believe you have, already, fully determined on the matrimonial conquest of Miss Grimshaw. Am I right?"

"Well, you are, De Lisle."

"Pardon my putting you so direct and perhaps rude a question, and allow me to thank you for the honor of your confidence, my dear Brydges."

Brooks jumped from behind the cab and knocked loudly at the door of the Countess of Lynden.

The two gentlemen entered, and were shown up into the drawing-room, where they were

soon joined by the Countess herself. She looked pale and fatigued, but having saluted her visitors, the one with her usual, courteous manner, and the other in accents of true affection, she sat down and launched, at once, into a political conversation with the Baronet.

"So we are all to toady the 'Squires, and great rural borough-mongers, Sir Stephen?"

"Yes it's time to look to the fortifications, Lady Lynden."

"I know, Sir Stephen, the cackling of geese saved Rome, but the idea is sadly unheroic. I think, had I been a Roman, I should have felt very unthankful for my salvation."

"I feel with you, quite, but we have no alternative, at present; we are at their mercy, I fear."

"Then all I hope is, since we must court them, that my friends will so arrange it, when it depends on them, that I may come into personal contact with half the trades and

handicrafts in the kingdom rather than have to entertain a single country 'Squire."

Ernest de Lisle and the Baronet exchanged a well understood look; and both of them felt how lucky it was the Countess had not given the hint a few days sooner.

The member, however, took up the conversation—"Your aunt, you see, De Lisle, hates the Squires as heartily as I do."

"In this instance," observed her ladyship, "I cannot object to your use of the word 'hate,' although generally, it finds no place in my vocabulary."

"It is a very good word, however, Lady Lynden, to be found in the appendix, for use on extraordinary occasions."

"True, Sir Stephen, I shall not check the energy of your language."

"Your nephew, as we came along, was defending the class."

"Not exactly, Brydges, I was chiefly

anxious to excuse the individuals composing it."

"My dear Ernest," interposed the countess, with great warmth of voice and manner, "what can you mean by 'excusing individuals'? Where have you ever met an endurable 'squire or 'squire's lady?"

"In these rooms, three evenings ago, dear aunt," said De Lisle, who knew his power with his relative, and hated deception.

"In these rooms,—at my party, Ernest! But I am not responsible, Sir Stephen; I suppose some of my friends brought them, in consequence of this new political movement."

"They came here, dear aunt, with Sir Stephen Brydges, at my request."

"That is not fair, Sir Stephen, to have urged me on, in your presence, to say a word reflecting on a class of persons, to which you have intimate friends belonging," said the

countess, faintly showing the annoyance which she really experienced. She felt she had been, as it were, entrapped into something like impoliteness.

All the circumstances, relating to the Grimshaws and their presence at the countess's rout, were then fully explained to her, having heard which, and comprehending the relation in which, as friends, they stood to the baronet, she regained her composure, and the conversation was continued.

"And so you think these inhabitants of Ackworth Hall, my dear Ernest, have merits sufficient to redeem their class?"

"I saw nothing to be angry at in them, the other evening; indeed, they rather amused me, and I should like to see more of them."

"You don't know, my dear boy, the spirit of the "*petite noblesse*," of this country so well as I do. Throughout the counties of England, you will find, every here and there, one very disagreeable person inserted among the

gentry, calling himself 'squire somebody, and claiming a certain kind of superiority over them. This claim is, of course, generally disallowed, and forthwith the offended dignitary proceeds to render himself highly obnoxious, in a hundred little narrow-minded ways. Nothing can be done in the vestry-room, or at the sessions, without consulting his wishes. His neighbours cannot co-operate with him, for public purposes, on account of his domineering airs and unenlightened views; yet, as he is the owner of a good deal of property among them, they find they can hardly get on without him, and so improvement stands still."

"But is it the 'squires, only, who are amenable to this charge?" demanded De Lisle; "how about the nobility?"

"A nobleman is, often, perhaps, a huge obstacle in the way of the good that might otherwise be done; but, generally, he offends upon so extensive and conspicuous a scale, that he is pretty sure to call forth opposition powers

large enough to counteract his mischief, while these 'squires, to whom I allude, are like so much grit in the very eye of improvement. They gradually raise a debilitating, chronic, irremovable circle of social irritation, all around them."

"Is that all your charge against them, dear aunt? I really think it is a pity you don't write a leading article on the subject in a certain morning journal, which is known for its contempt for what is called 'the country party,' I believe, Sir Stephen?"

"The Countess will permit me," said the member for ——, "to add one more feature to the very just and able description she has given of the 'Squirearchy—and, by that word, I mean to point to the little great men, in their own esteem, who reside in the country districts, and not, by any means, to all country gentlemen of wealth and legitimately used influence. The members of the true squirearchy increase the disgust which is felt at their

ridiculous pride, towards their equals, by their mean adulation and toadying of the really great, who, however, heartily despise them."

"I rather imagine," replied De Lisle, "that is a fault too common to all the inferior classes of this, and of every other country, with respect to their superiors in life."

"True, yet the squirearchy practise the sin most offensively."

"Ernest," said the Countess, in a half-angry, half joking tone, "have you, by chance, fallen in love with Miss Grimshaw?"

"Not altogether," was the good tempered answer.

"I am glad to hear that, for depend on it she has with you. The least attention, from the nephew of an earl, is irresistible by the eldest daughter of a Squire."

"And I suppose, dear Lady Lynden," said De Lisle, "that on the same principle, such a

young woman would be a tolerably easy prey for a Baronet?"

"You and Sir Stephen," replied the Countess, a sudden thought crossing her mind, "had better, both of you, enter the lists for the honour of Miss Grimshaw's hand."

"Well, Lady Lynden," said the member, with his accustomed misleading *sang-froid*, "who knows, yet, what may happen to either of us?"

And rising from his seat, he bade her good morning—Ernest did the same, and they left the drawing-room, together.

Those were times when the public, long trained to admire the British stage, and full of recollections of Siddons, O'Neil, the Kembles, Young, and Edmund Kean, had still, happily, left them occasional opportunities of seeing a great play, worthily performed, within the walls of the larger London theatres. Macready had arisen, with his brilliant and impas-

sioned style, combining, by his daring and original genius, much of the dignity of the elder tragedy with the restlessness and dash of modern melodrama; proving himself, indeed, an actor of strong conceptions, deep feeling, and irresistible declamation, but falling short of the highest requirements of his noble art, in many physical respects, and marring many of his most successful designs, by an exaggerated mannerism, which time has not quite cured. Nor had that finished histrionic scholar, Mr. Vandenhoff, as yet become almost an alien to our metropolitan stage; for, in spite of the rising tide of foreign frivolities, there was still sufficient taste, existing in the capital, to recognize in him the highest and most classical representative of pure tragedy, then, as now, living. His fine, rich voice, unspoiled by a single meretricious accent, yet capable of attuning itself to all the varieties of passion, his plain, but dignified bearing, and his grave,

manly, expressive countenance, were still the delight of the reputed best judges, among his countrymen.

Now it so happened, that on the evening of the particular day, on which the above conversation took place, Mr. Vandenhoff was to perform in one of his best characters, at Covent Garden, and as he had, at the outset of his professional career, made many successful appearances before Devonshire audiences, in that portion of the county to which the Grimshaws belonged, the Major resolved to take his family to the theatre, for the purpose of again seeing him, and Ernest De Lisle and the Baronet accepted invitations to be of the party. We shall, not, here describe the performance, that charmed an overflowing audience on the occasion, as that would be going too far out of the course of our narrative. When the curtain fell, at the end of the fifth act, the applause was immense, throughout the house; and it was in the pause, which succeeded to this

moment of excitement, that Major Grimshaw found courage to give De Lisle a very pressing invitation to visit him, at Ackworth Hall, to enjoy a few weeks' sporting. The curiosity of the latter had been aroused, by the morning's conversation, to know something more authentic of the abused Squirearchy; he was zealously attached to sporting; he fancied that Sir Stephen Brydges was, positively, fool enough to begin to betray symptoms of something like jealousy, at his growing intimacy with the Grimshaws, and, putting all these considerations together, the visit promised to afford him so much amusement, in various ways, that he determined, at once, to accept the invitation. In little more than a week afterwards, the family, having called in Hyde Park Gardens, but without meeting with the Countess at home, left town for Devonshire, and thither we must now, also, return with the obliging reader.

CHAPTER VII.

Hard luck, alake! when poverty and wild
Weeds out o' fashion, and a lanely bield,
Wi' a sma' cast o' wiles, should, in a twitch,
Gie ane the hatefu' name, a wrinkled witch.

Gentle Shepherd.

Come bring with a noise,
My merrie, merrie boyes,
The Christmas log to the firing,
While my good dame she
Bids ye all be free
And drink to your heart's desiring.

Herrick.

It will be remembered, that we closed our third chapter with the remand of Ramsay from before the magistrates, in consequence of a portion of the evidence given by Mr. Frankum,

and of some ill-understood hints thrown out by a woman called Katharine Morrison, better known as "Crazy Kate." Forthwith, the most searching enquiries were set on foot, in order to discover what became of the person alluded to, as having been found in a state of intoxication, in the highway, on the night of the supposed murder; but nothing respecting him was made out, with even tolerable clearness, except the mere fact that a man, somewhat answering the very imperfect description of the stranger given by Frankum and his party, was known to have joined, on the following day, the incomplete crew of a frigate of war, then lying, for the purpose of recruiting her hands, off the little fishing village which we have spoken of as situated on the coast of the Bristol Channel, and celebrated as one of the haunts of a band of smugglers. Looking, therefore, to the unfortunate circumstance that, in the alarm and excitement of the occasion, no one had sufficiently noted the personal appearance of the missing

party, to be able to swear to him again, even supposing the Admiralty were induced to allow the necessary investigation to be made, among the men who had joined the naval service, about that time, the district authorities saw no use in seeking him any further. As to the woman Morrison, she obstinately refused to add another word to what she had already said, and her reputed insanity appeared to render her sufficiently secure against all the attempts that might be made, whether legally or otherwise, to compel her to proceed with her volunteered evidence.

The result was that, after remaining a few days longer in custody, Ramsay was liberated, without, as the magistrates assured him, any fresh stain of infamy having been added to his already soiled character.

"Had you," said Mr. Maitland to the prisoner, when he came before the bench for his final examination, "been a person of sober, industrious habits, known honesty, and of a less savage and violent temper than that which

public opinion ascribes to you, this unfounded charge would never have been laid against you."

But although the law thus presumed him to be innocent, Ramsay went back to his home a murderer, in the estimation of seven out of every ten of the persons who knew him. That evidence against a man which is derived from his own previous life is the most crushing that can be alleged; and it gains a hundred-fold, in power, when the particular crime it is held to prove rests solely upon its authority. A set of facts may display many exculpatory inconsistencies, when carefully examined, and especially when ingeniously commented upon by one paid to disprove them, but what can withstand the force of that testimony which consists in showing the exact adaptation of a particular agent to a particular act, when there are no little circumstances to interfere with the apparent simplicity of the proof? It *could* be, therefore it *is* so, is a very prevalent and po-

pular kind of logic, used in the explanation of every difficult question. It has created half the weak points of science, and it has, probably, sent many innocent persons to the gallows.

As years rolled away, and the mystery of Wildman's disappearance became greater, the general conviction abroad, against Ramsay, became even more than ever confirmed. The fact is, that the public will never remain very long in doubt upon any point in which it is interested; it can go on exceedingly well, indeed quite naturally, in the rankest error, but by no means in doubt, however faint. Although, then, nothing positive was ever proved against him; although he, repeatedly, swore, with the most tremendous oaths, that he had no hand in the disappearance of the farmer; although he attempted a certain amount of reformation in his moral character, got drunk less frequently, cheated less in his trade as a horse-dealer, and even, sometimes, went to church, on a Sunday, Isaac Ramsay was, nevertheless, always

thought to be, really, Wildman's murderer. He was often openly taunted with his crime in the public market place, or tavern, and his name grew to be the terror of the children of the neighbourhood.

Crazy Kate escaped not, altogether, from the suspicion of knowing something about the deed. It was remembered, that when young this woman, who was then very good looking, had been, for a long time, courted by Ramsay, and their wedding day was even fixed, when, most unexpectedly, her friends discovered that marriage, although it might help to mend her damaged honour, could not entirely save it from injury. To make matters worse, her intended husband protested that it lay not with him to save her from impending disgrace; and he refused, in consequence, to fulfil his engagement. Three months afterwards, Katherine Morrison became a mother, and her relations, who were in a respectable station in life, casting her off, owing to her fault, the child was necessarily

thrown for support upon the parish, and the little burthen being ill relished in that quarter, Kate was called upon to declare the name of the father.

At that time there resided, not far from Knowle-water, a dissenting minister, named Manly, who had charge of two or three methodist congregations, within the district. He was esteemed by his people to be a man of great piety, and untiring zeal. He was perpetually on foot, moving about among his followers, many of whom he had converted from the error of their ways, and the great sin of listening to the preaching of the regularly appointed pastors of the surrounding parishes. Mr. Manly, with no improper views, but actuated by the deepest policy of proselytism, directed a great deal of attention to the state of religion among the younger females of his locality, one of whom was Katherine Morrison. He visited her at her home, to see her spirit in its every day undress; he conversed with her,

before and after services, in the little private apartments belonging to his chapels, where he usually deposited his hat and stick, previously to showing himself to his flock, and he walked with her, frequently, both to and from the houses of prayer; but, of course, none of these attentions ever gave rise to a single word of scandal. The minister was above the reach of the breath of calumny, and a reproach to the sleek and lazy servants of the Established Church. It may, then, easily be imagined how deep was the astonishment excited in the minds of all those who knew the man when Kate, on oath, ascribed her misfortune to the pastoral tenderness of the dissenting parson. On him, indeed, the imputation fell with the blasting effect of lightning; it blackened his fair name in an instant, destroyed his peace of mind, lost him his friends and admirers, brought down upon him the heavy censures of his professional superiors and, in a short time, drove him forth from the scene of his zealous labours,

a disgraced and ruined man. In order that the dissenting cause might suffer as little as possible by this sad *faux pas*, the mother and child were offered a liberal support in a distant county, which offer was accepted, and a new minister having been appointed to the vacant chapels, it was hoped that poor Manly, and his affectionat ministry, would soon wear out of remembrance.

It was ten years after this event that Katherine Morrison returned to her native parish, and at once betrayed those symptoms of mental disease which were not long in obtaining for her the name of "Crazy Kate." Her first act was to seek the clergyman, and confess to him that she had, under the influence of certain promises and threats made use of by Ramsay, whom she declared to be the real father of her child, been induced falsely to swear her illicit offspring upon the unfortunate Mr. Manly. The avowal, however, was accompanied by so much wildness and eccentricity, both of mind and manner,

that it appeared little, if any, reliance could be placed upon it; and besides, even although it had been strictly believed, of what use could it be? The mischief was done, the child provided for, and all interest in the matter long since dead and buried with the reputation of Mr. Manly. Nobody believed Kate's tale; she was "crazy"; she took to living in a solitary hovel by herself, to herb gathering, to loud mutterings of self-reproach, when she thought herself quite alone, and, finally, she came to be regarded as a person too much like a witch not to be somewhat avoided, and yet too silly and forlorn not to be equally pitied. Still, as Kate had persisted, through long years, that she and Ramsay had murdered the character of an innocent man, now when she declared, however vaguely, that she knew something of Alick Wildman's disappearance, many persons found it easy to believe that she might, really, have been concerned in the still fouler crime; and hence the share of suspicion that her unex-

plained conduct, before the magistrates, drew down upon her.

We need only add, in further explanation of what took place immediately after the supposed crime, that Knowle-wāter, which for a time continued to be the centre of so much interest and public excitement, which was spoken of even in the journals of the metropolis, and every where found in men's mouths, throughout the Kingdom, gradually assumed its original tranquillity and repose. At intervals, each longer than the one which preceded it, a stray report, brought to the scene either by a neighbour who had chanced to hear it at market, or conveyed hastily by a stranger arriving express from a more remote district, aroused afresh the hopes and heart-beatings of the inmates; but by degrees even these transitory alarms subsided. The chill of the succeeding winter froze the hot and giddy tongue of rumour into profound silence. The story of the lost man grew stale and the festivities of Christmas set in; the

country was soon wrapped in its dazzling mantle of snow, and the widow put on the accustomed mourning for the loss of a husband. Months summed up into years, at the end of four or five of which, and when grief had given place to resignation, and hope no longer agitated the bosom of the chief mourner, it was odd to see poor Alick's well known garments, his grey coat, his corduroy breeches, and his plush waistcoats, come forth from the old oak wardrobe, to undergo the process of alteration necessary to adapt them, one by one, to the wearing of his only son.

Fortunately for the widow, she had but this boy and a little girl, some three or four years his junior, to provide for; the latter being the sickly child incidentally mentioned at the very outset of our narrative, as lying in its cradle and rocked by its mother in the terrible hour of storm when "Speed" arrived at the door of the farm-house, without her master. Having but these two children, being a woman of great

intelligence and uncommon energy of character, and, thanks to the shrewd, business talents of her husband, having been, moreover, left in comfortable pecuniary circumstances, Mrs. Wildman was advised by her landlord to retain possession of the estate. It is hardly necessary to say that with personal qualities entitling her to so much respect, and placed in a position calling largely for sympathy she received every attention calculated to soften the pain of her peculiar widowhood.

Knowle-water was the largest farm in the neighbourhood, and the Wildmans had always held a somewhat superior position to the rest of the farmers around them; although they, certainly, never exacted from their neighbours any other marks of their acknowledgment of the difference than such as were willingly bestowed, for more endearing reasons than those of social superiority. After the loss of her husband, therefore, it was with no feelings of jealousy that the other substantial tenants of

of the Rev. Mr. Greville saw the widow and her two children taken under the especial protection of their excellent landlord. The children of the Rectory and farm-house played often together, and Mrs. Wildman was, not unfrequently, a guest at the clergyman's table.

With the boy the mother had no difficulty; his health was good, his future calling, as a farmer, clearly pointed out, and his education, consequently, easily supplied. For five years he trudged through all weathers, winter and summer, to a commercial school, in a neighbouring town, at the end of which time, he was found stored with sufficient useful knowledge for the efficient transaction of his rural business. But matters were not so happy as regarded the younger child. She had been, during infancy, sickly, and was still delicate; ill-suited to the duties of a farm, yet there seemed to the mother no chance of settling her in any more favoured position in life. Here Mr. Greville again stepped in with his friendly

counsel. He saw in the girl's gentle manners, intelligent mind, and youthful beauty, qualities that, if duly cultivated, might afford her as good means of making her own way in the world, as the health and vigor of her brother afforded him. She might marry a wealthy tradesman, or, possibly, some one better: at any rate Mr. Greville, though no advocate for educating people beyond the necessities of their station, saw that little Mary Wildman might form a very proper exception to the general rule, and he, therefore, persuaded her mother to give her the very best education her means would allow, and the reader has been already told that those means were not at all distressingly narrowed. Accordingly, the girl was sent to the same boarding-school, at Exeter, at which the good Rector's own two daughters were placed. We should not feel justified in relating these trifling circumstances, except, that as this character will soon play a conspicu-

ous part in our tale, it is necessary to show how it was eagerly formed.

At school, Mary was no idler, and her progress, there, was sufficiently rapid for the commencement of a much more wonderful heroine, than we are likely ever to make of her. With a nature naturally refined, she soon took the tone of the new manners by which she was surrounded; yet her mind was too strong in its individuality to suffer her to be smoothed off into the insipidity of a mere well behaved school-girl. She had a warm heart, ever leading her to remember the healthful, active, unaffected habits of her home; to think of her mother as always too busy in her work, and too plain in her dress to be quite a lady, in spite of her, now and then, dining with the Rector, and of her brother, whose rough athletic frame and ruddy cheeks prevented her from forming to herself any of those *beaux ideals* of young gentlemen, which too early haunt the seminaries of girls,

and which, had she conceived any such, might have, one day, made the old family scene at Knowle-water appear very unsatisfactory in her eyes. On the contrary, at the end of every succeeding half year, Mary Wildman returned home with all her former love for country life, for humble people, for early rising, for the green fields and agricultural occupations not only undiminished but greatly and manifestly increased. It was in these vacation seasons, at Midsummer, under the influence of sunny days, mainly passed in field, in wood, or garden, and at Christmas, beside her mother's blazing, hospitable hearth, where brown ale was often drunk in honor of the season and to the health and happiness of the inmates, that the school-girl inhaled those thoughts and feelings without which the hazardous transplantation of her mind into a kind of soil perfectly different from that in which it had been early nurtured would, probably, have changed her into one of those miserable specimens of forced culture,

and incongruous and ricketty gentility which we see so often issuing, completely "finished," from almost all of our female schools. Boys, perhaps, are of somewhat harder stuff, and not to be thus easily broken up into nothingness or transformed into something worse, which may account for the fact that their schools do not appear to be such positive *papier maché* mills as those for the softer sex too generally are; sending out into society little varnished toys, hardly strong enough to bear the wear and tear of being looked at as ornaments.

Stlll, notwithstanding our anxiety to show that school never spoiled our heroine, we must admit that it a good deal changed her—And the change was exhibited less in anything observable in herself than in her views of her friends, and the things about her. The habitual country pronunciation of her dearly loved brother was, as she grew older, systematically interfered with, in the hope of improving it; his dress, too, was now and then

remarked on, and the wearer accused of being less careful to keep it neat and clean than he might be, in spite of his daily labours. His slouched forelock was gradually swept from his fine open brow, and his rough hands, when out of immediate employ, taught to appear as dainty white as circumstances would permit. At seventeen Mary Wildman completed her school education; and it is at this happy period of her young life that our story obliges us to bring her upon the scene.

It was the afternoon preceding Christmas-day, and the spacious old kitchen, at Knowle-water, was rapidly undergoing its annual furbishing, in anticipation of the welcome morrow. The walls and ceiling had been re-whitewashed, the long rows of pewter plates and dishes, on the dresser, polished into the brightness of silver, and the deep, old, many paned windows carefully cleaned, while, near at hand, lay newly gathered evergreens, ready to be employed in honor of the merry time. The

mistress of the establishment looked considerably older than when last we presented her to the reader; her hair was grey and her complexion faded, but the quick eye and decisive tone of voice proved that all her original activity of mind remained, unimpaired.

"Now, my dear Mary," she said, addressing her daughter, "if you are really determined to see Kate to-day, you had better be going at once; although I wish you would send to her, instead of going out in the snow yourself."

"I promised to go to her to-day, mother, and I would not willingly break my promise, unless you particularly desire it. The snow will do me no harm."

"You must hasten then, or night will be here before you return; besides, you must remember, that our friends will come early this evening. Mr. Frankum is to be here, and will

bring with him the stranger, who was at church last Sunday."

"And whom else have you invited?" replied the daughter, slightly colouring, although her mind was fixed upon a person that her mother could not, possibly, guess at the time.

"I have not invited many others, my dear child, but, doubtless, as usual, we shall have plenty of friends dropping in, to taste our Christmas ale, during the evening. I should not wonder if Mr. Arthur Maitland looked in, among the rest."

"As he did last year, and the year before," observed Mary.

"Did he?" said the mother, looking at the speaker, who now blushed crimson, on reflecting how accurately her memory had served her, respecting a matter apparently so unimportant. But the blush was only partially comprehended by the busy housewife.

The girl ran off before her confusion had subsided, and a minute afterwards stood in

front of the looking-glass, in her own little bed-room; her soft, hazel eyes had never before seemed so bright, even to herself, and though her heart was throbbing almost audibly, yet its beatings seemed as sweet, to her, as the ringing of a silver bell, and she experienced a joyousness of spirit, as new to her as it was delightful. There is some truth in the mythological fiction about love being the effect of an arrow-shot, especially when applied to first love. It is not so in the subsequent attacks of the passion, except in very weak natures, but the heart's first wound is always the work of a sudden stroke, given when we least expect it. There is, too, very often, a creative power in this stroke, quite as magical as the tap of Harlequin's wand. The feelings are all ready prepared, within the virgin bosom, to chime together when the proper time shall arrive, but as yet, the girl or boy possessing them, remains a child, in the truest sense of the word. Unheralded, unexpectedly, love enters the temple,

and the heart's first merry, thrilling peal, in honour of the newly born passion, proclaims the advent of another man or woman, to the full and perfect life of human intercourse. Love, indeed, is the wise tooth of the affections; it is the last to come, and the first to go.

Gathering her bright curls beneath a close bonnet, and wrapping herself in a warm cloak, Mary again descended to the kitchen, took a previously packed, small basket in her hand, pressed her warm lips to her mother's cheek, and sallied forth upon her errand.

The weather was bitterly cold, and the snow lay thick upon the ground. The span of the horizon seemed much narrower than usual, from the distinctness with which distant objects were discernible, amid the glittering whiteness around; and the entire scene presented that peculiar aspect of complete stillness, which deep snow invariably confers, not only upon the face of the open country, but even upon the close

thoroughfares of ordinarily busy cities. The trees appeared as though sleeping under their weight of the frozen element, so motionless extended their spectral branches in the keen air; cottages lay half embedded in the white, universal covering, and only gave signs of the life within them, by sending up into the clear sky, their thin, quiet columns of blue smoke; hedgerows were almost entirely obliterated, and the small streams, abounding in the neighbourhood, ran with choked voices through the narrow valleys, imprisoned by sheets of thick, black ice.

Fortunately for the convenience of our young pedestrian, the surface of the snow had been so hardened by the frost that her light feet scarcely left a trace upon it, and she therefore walked quickly onward, her complexion growing every minute more beautifully brilliant in the intense cold. She felt not the tingling sensation at her finger ends, for her heart was glowing within her with a feeling of strange

and novel happiness. School days were over, love days were come. She thought of the merry evening she should have on her return home, and it quickened a pace already a rapid one. She had to cross a few fields, lying opposite to the farm house, descend into a narrow, secluded valley, and then, traversing a small rustic bridge, over the brook which gave its name of Knowle-water to her mother's estate, she entered a rude pathway, very little worn, which led her up through the brambly, uneven surface of a high wood, situated on the side of a steep hill. What reader is there who will not feel the profound hush reigning through this woodland solitude, on such an afternoon as the one we have described? The shrill twittering song of the Robin, ruffling up his feathers against the cold, the moving of a branch, and the occasional fall of a portion of the snow encrusted upon the trees, were the only sounds to be heard. But Mary hardly

felt that she was alone. Arthur Maitland occupied her thoughts.

In a few minutes she reached a low, thatched hovel, standing on the margin of a little wild glade formed by the felling of some high timber many years previously; a fact sufficiently demonstrated by the appearance of a number of half rotten tree stumps, still visible above the surface of the ground, being only imperfectly covered by the snow which, in this sheltered nook, lay much less deep than it did in the open fields. Unless the reader should insist on its mere position being so, we must state that there was nothing about this sylvan dwelling at all of a romantic character but, on the contrary, it gave tokens of being tenanted by a person sufficiently ordinary in tastes to comply with the occupations and manner of living belonging to the most every day people. In front stood a small rick of dried wood, intended for fuel, while at the rear was a little

garden, that appeared well filled with the common kinds of vegetables. The view of the distant country obtainable from this spot, through the openings of the trees, showed, perhaps, that the inmate of the hovel did not despise the cheering influence of natural scenery.

As the visitor approached the door she could hear the sound of a voice, within, speaking in a high and excited tone, but the words seemed all, as they became more distinctly audible, to form themselves into brief, exclamatory sentences of self reproach, and cries for mercy and forgiveness. A stranger might have feared to intrude at such a time, but Mary laying her hand upon the latch raised it, without hesitation, and entered the building. There, upon a narrow bed, which, however, looked remarkably clean and neat, lay a woman far advanced in life, yet not so old as to induce the belief of her being bed ridden. At the opening of the door, she ceased her weird lamentations and

placed herself in a sitting posture, her face, at the same moment, assuming a look of pleasure and contentment as little like the expression of a "witch" as can be possibly conceived.

"My dear Miss Mary," she exclaimed, "I was beginning to fear I shouldn't see you to wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year, when it comes."

"And if I had known, Kate, that I should again hear you talking in your old, unearthly way, to yourself, about sins and crimes that nobody understands or believes, I certainly would not have come."

"There now, there now," answered the woman, "I see you are angry with me, but my dear young lady you don't know all that is [illegible] heart for these many long years."

"Well but, Kate, as I have often told you, if there is anything really oppressing your conscience, you ought at once to confide it to Mr. Greville."

"Oh, Miss Mary, don't mistake me; don't

think that I know anything about your poor father. I had no hand in it, no knowledge of it, for all they say of me. But, I shall yet know something of it," she added, in a voice and manner that certainly seemed to justify her being called crazy; "I shall know something of it when *he* returns to me."

Mary Wildman had often, before, heard this frantic avowal made, and always valued it at what it seemed worth; she knew, accordingly, how to check the fit, and she replied—

"Kate, if you mean to frighten me away, again, by these silly ravings, say so, and I will leave you immediately."

The old woman seized the speaker's hand and pressing it to her pale lips, grew almost instantly composed. Her visitor continued:—

"And now, Kate, that you are quiet, tell me how you feel, to-day?"

"Thank you, miss, I am better; I hope soon to be out again."

"Has Mr. Greville been to see you, since the other day?"

"He has not, but I expect he will come this afternoon."

She had scarcely spoken the words, when the door was again opened, and the old clergyman, with his benevolent countenance, his grave suit of black, his broad-brimmed hat, and thick walking-stick, entered the cottage.

"What, my dear Mary, you here again? I thought you would be at home, at this hour, preparing for Christmas Eve. How do you find Kate?"

"Much better, sir; still a little inclined to talk nonsense about herself, but a great deal better than she was the day before yesterday."

Kate looked from the speaker to the venerable pastor, with an expression of fondness in her face that told, eloquently, of the kind nursing she had received from the former.

"She is a good little girl, is she not, Kate?"

enquired Mr. Greville, comprehending her feeling.

"She is sir, God bless her," replied the woman, "but alas, she has no father!"

"God provides, Kate, both for the fatherless and the destitute," observed the clergyman, in mild but firm accents, which, he knew, would at once cut short any further comments of that kind, in which, to say the truth, the patient was ever most ready to indulge. "I wish to read the Bible to you; will you listen to its words?"

The sick woman, at once, assented, and Mr. Greville, drawing the only chair in the apartment to the side of the bed, proceeded to read to her a chapter from one of the gospels. Meanwhile, Mary, resorting to the stores of her basket, prepared for her a comfortable tea, which she set before her, as soon as the reading was concluded. When Kate had partaken of this meal, her two visitors bade her good evening,

and promising soon to return, took their departure, together.

"Kate appears more excited to-day than usual," remarked Mr. Greville, when they were out of hearing of the person alluded to; "don't you think she is?"

"She is more troubled, sir, than I have seen her for many months. Again her strange manner half forces me to believe she, really, knows something respecting the disappearance of my poor father."

"No, my dear girl, I believe not. She is tormented by the remembrance of one enormous crime, that of wilful perjury, which sometimes leads her crazily to confound her own guilt with that of others; but I trust that time, and God's grace, will bring her peace and true repentance."

At the end of the wood the speakers had to separate; Mary invited Mr. Greville to accompany her home, for the purpose of witnessing

their amusements; but he declined, saying that he felt he was not so young as formerly, and less liked walking after night-fall, especially in such frosty weather as then prevailed. Shaking her warmly by the hand, and recommending her to make her way home, as quickly as possible, the old pastor and his little friend parted company.

Mary had now only a strip of meadow land to traverse before reaching the bridge, to which allusion was made in describing the route she followed to arrive at Kate's dwelling, some two hours previously. Thinking of the scene she had just quitted, and the remarks of Mr. Greville, she was suddenly startled at finding herself face to face with a stranger. This was a man in the prime of life, tall and athletic, with a good deal of the sailor gait and manner. He wore large black whiskers, running beneath his chin, like an immense comforter, and mingling at the sides of the face with the

hairy flaps of a heavy looking fur cap, which was closely strapped down in order to protect the wearer as much as possible from the cold. The bottoms of his woollen trousers were rolled half way up over his boots, his costume being completed by the addition of a thick pea-coat, descending below the knees. He had entered one end of the bridge, just as Mary reached the other, but he stepped back to allow her to pass it first. A brief "good night," was said by each party, and they proceeded on their respective ways. At a turning in the path. a few yards further on, the girl, whose curiosity had been greatly moved, looked back and saw that the stranger was still pursuing his way towards the wood. Where could he be going, and on what errand? The road led only to Kate's abode. She felt alarmed for the safety of the sick woman, but it was now clear she could render her no assistance, however much she might need it, and therefore she walked rapidly on. The

Christmas moon had arisen, making the snowy fields glisten with tenfold brilliancy, under the influence of her silvery beams.

Rather more than half an hour before this rencounter took place, Arthur Maitland had quitted his embowered retreat in the centre of another high wood, in the neighbourhood, having obtained a last successful shot at the wood pigeons, which came, with full crops, from the adjacent turnip fields, where they had been greedily feeding, to roost for the night in the old trees, beneath which he had patiently waited for them. But we must briefly explain who this young sportsman is, since we have, in a preceding page, pledged the taste of another of our characters for his being a person calculated to inspire a very earnest and tender interest in his own behalf.

He was the only son of that Mr. Maitland whom the reader already knows as one of the three Magistrates, so fully described in an earlier chapter. In early life, too delicate to

to undergo that regular course of education, at school, necessary to qualify him for pursuing one of the learned professions, as they are called, in honor of the few really learned individuals belonging to them, Arthur was still, although in his nineteenth year, undecided upon his future course of life. But he had already shown a strong taste, if not an actual genius for painting, and was, therefore, half resolved to commence a systematic study of the art, with a vew to making it his profession and means of livelihood. In the meanwhile he was enjoying a tolerably happy existence, by dividing his time, irregularly, between sporting, reading, drawing, love-dreams, and castle building. Had he not been ambitious, these habits (perhaps, indeed, they can never make part of an unambitious nature) might have become everything to him, as he would certainly, in consequence, have become worse than nothing to the world. As it was, however, they slowly, but surely, nurtured within

him thoughts and aspirations that must ere long, like as it were the knowledge of the tree of good and evil, drive him forth from the little Paradise of his youthful years and plunge him, ill prepared, into the great sea of active life's unceasing troubles. In stature he was tall, but so well proportioned, so erect in carriage, and combining so much elasticity with apparent strength, in every movement of his body, that he had nothing of that gaunt, *raw-bonedness* of outline which the generality of tall young men, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, pay as the price of a commanding figure, in riper years. With eyes almost black, but so frank, full, and sunny in their expression that they possessed all the proverbial softness of hazel, a finely cut mouth, clear complexion, and a forehead that seemed too much charged with intellect to lie passive, smooth, and passionless beneath the straying masses of his wavy, dark brown hair, the embryo painter might fairly be termed

handsome. As to character, his face was full of it, but in such a way that it set physiognomy at open defiance; and only time could determine whether it was to settle into the clear index of imaginative sensibility, or of a firm, vigorous, and active character. Personally and mentally, there was a freshness and energy about him, exactly calculated to awaken and retain the affections of such a girl as Mary Wildman.

With her mind pre-occupied with reflections, regarding the strange man she had just seen, the chill air rather rudely kissing her fresh cheeks, and the snow crunching under her feet, Mary was hastening across the fields towards her home, when she heard her name called loudly from behind, and turning round she perceived Arthur Maitland, with his gun in one hand, and a brace of wood pigeons in the other, bounding, knee-deep, through a snow drift, in order to overtake her.

"Why, Mary Wildman! can it be possible

that you are out in such weather as this, and so late too, for you to be crossing the fields alone!"

"Well, it is rather late," was the reply "but as to the weather, I delight in it. Going out in the snow is, to me, something like what I should imagine visiting quite a new country must be. The most familiar places appear changed. I neither know the fancifully laden trees again, nor the old stiles, nor the sunken cottages, nor anything else around me. Even you, Mr. Maitland, with your thick coat and gun, hardly look as usual."

"Come, hang it, Mary, don't Mr. Maitland me, or I shall say that, after all, you are no exception to the spoiling influence of a boarding school. But never mind, fortunately I am to be one of your mother's guests this evening, and as, I presume, she means to allow the old games to be played, I shall, doubtless, find an easy way of once more renewing our former intimacy. Depend on it, as this is likely to be

my last Christmas in Devonshire, perhaps for many years, I shall make the most of my time and opportunities to-night."

"It is then true that you are going to London?"

"I hope so, either to London or Paris; I am yet uncertain which."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mary, frankly.

"You are?" asked her companion, "may I really believe you? If I thought so, I should go from home much happier, and I would pray you to repeat your words over and over again in my ears, that I might keep the echo of them in my heart until my return."

"Do not misunderstand me," replied Mary slightly colouring, at the effect created by her very brief remark, "I meant to say nothing new to you, or of which you ought to have any doubt. Have we not been friends from childhood, and have I not, always, expressed

sorrow when our companionship has been, for a time, interrupted?"

"That will not do, dearest Mary," returned the young man, throwing the birds, which were tied together, across the fowling piece on his shoulder, and loitering in his pace, for the purpose of prolonging the conversation as much as possible. "I will not let you evade my questions; we are not any longer children, and I wish, now, to be something more to you than a mere companion."

"We must walk faster, indeed," observed Mary, "it is growing late, and I shall be waited for at home. I tell you, again, I regret that you are going so soon to leave us."

Arthur laid his hand upon his companion's arm, to detain her.

"Stay, one word more; you are almost home; do not say to leave *us*, speak only of yourself, say that you regret I must quit *you*, dear Mary. Come, tell me that—I will not

suffer you to escape me, until you have said it."

"Well, then, I am indeed very sorry."

"Now, remember," added her lover, "that is what I shall compel you to ratify, presently, under the mistletoe, in your own home; think of it then, dearest Mary, and when I am gone, do not forget your words of to-night. It will be the happiest Christmas eve of my life!"

They were entering the enclosed court, in front of the farm house, as these words were uttered, and, in another minute, they crossed the hospitable threshold. Near the blazing fire, in the large kitchen, were assembled Mrs. Wildman, two or three hale-looking young farmers, and a middle-aged stranger, of rather gentlemanly appearance, and our old friend Frankum, the only change in whom was that his hair, although but little of it had fallen, had become quite grey.

"Ah! 'pon my honour, Miss Mary, you

look brighter than the holly berries, and you are exactly under the mistletoe bough."

The speaker, amid the laughter of the company, caught the girl in his arms, and was surprised to find that, rather contrary to the precedents of former years, she struggled hard to free herself; but ruthlessing crushing the close bonnet, that imperfectly barricaded her sweet face, he succeeded in giving her a hearty kiss.

"There, Arthur Maitland, my boy, that's the way to kiss a pretty girl. Why I am worth a dozen of you young men, yet. Mr. Barrow," continued he, addressing the stranger, "it is thus I am allowed to open half the Christmas evenings in our neighbourhood. It is a pleasant way of drawing the cork of festivity, hardly known to you Londoners."

Arthur felt an odd mixture of confusion and indignation at the act and words of Frankum, but he dared not show either, knowing the quizzing that must necessarily follow, if he did

so. Mary Wildman, also, experienced something like anger, from which, however, she speedily recovered, and making a virtue of necessity, joined, as well as she could, in the general merriment, while she disengaged the damaged bonnet from her head, and allowed the rich curls of her dark hair to escape from their confinement.

"What a lovely creature!" observed the stranger, familiarly, to young Maitland, who stood by his side; "I should not think you much approve of the mistletoe-bough, if it is to be made such use of."

Arthur's dark eye flashed at this impertinent remark, but pretending not to have understood its meaning, he strode to another part of the room, and laid the birds he had shot upon a side table, saying as he did so:

"You see, Mrs. Wildman, I have fulfilled the promise I made this afternoon, when you were good enough to invite me here, this evening. There is my contribution to the supper."

The Christmas, or as it is always called, in Devonshire, the "Ash Fagot," was now ordered in, and fresh visitors began to arrive. This prodigious fagot was formed, in the centre, of pieces of solid wood, many of them as large in circumference as the body of a moderate sized man. Towards the surface, the component parts grew smaller, and the outer coating consisted, almost entirely, of the light, brittle spray of green ash. Around this scientifically compacted mass were firmly twisted a series of withey binds, at intervals evidently shorter than required for the mere purpose of holding it securely together. The whole was not far from a dozen feet in length, by four in height, and of such enormous weight that several men were necessary to drag it to the vast fire place. The ceremony of safely depositing it on the hospitable hearth, where it was to be consumed, was conducted with great solemnity and care, and more resembled a matter of serious business than winter merry-making; but as soon as the

experienced priests of this domestic altar declared the usual annual oblation was ready to be offered up, a regiment of laughing youngsters, of both sexes, came forward, armed with bellows, and commenced blowing the red embers, that glowed beneath it, until tongues of flame shot up, from all points, and uniting together enveloped it, very speedily, in a sheet of fire. Then, as the green wood snapped, and hissed, and the bright sparks darted, in broad columns, up the chimney, the first jug of "nut brown ale" was brought in, by the mistress herself. And what a jug it was, from which to pour friendly libations in honour of Christmas! How the snowy foam ran over the top and down the bulging sides; and how soft and smoothly the clear liquor rilled into the semicircle of mugs, horns, and glasses held forth to receive it!

"My friends," said Mrs. Wildman, stepping forward with a silver tankard in her hand, filled with the beverage, "from this cup, my dear husband, for many successive happy years,

drank a hearty welcome to his kind friends and neighbours, and 'though he is gone mysteriously from amongst us, I have continued his custom. I wish you all a happy Christmas, to-morrow, in your own houses; but doubly I wish to see you all merry here, to-night."

The allusion to the lost farmer produced a deep effect upon the company, and there was an instantaneous murmur of "Ay, poor Alick;" "Poor maister!" from the various persons around; the wealthier speaking of his qualities as an honest, generous, friend, and the poorer recalling his benevolent goodness to themselves, and declaring that never was either his heart or hand found closed against the poor man's wants. The next feeling was for the widow herself. A dozen rough, but sincere hands, were thrust forward, in cordial confusion, to bid her many happy returns of the present glad season; and further off in the circle there were innumerable bows and curtsies made her, by her humble guests, and good wishes and even

prayers, for the welfare of herself and children, were offered up.

The large kitchen was now filled with contented, happy, healthful faces, over all of which the ruddy blaze cast its strong, powerful, and cheering light. The children were playing hide and seek, about under the tables and benches, and in the wide stone passages, while the older folks chatted in groups, and the young men eyed, with impatience, the buxom girls and the mistletoe bough. As if to dispel the slight cloud of sadness her first address had produced, Mrs. Wildman again claimed a hearing—

"Young men," she said, "I have now a word for you: there is the license bough, and there are the girls; my own daughter is among them; be gentle with your work, and if one of them attempts to escape you, without her Christmas kiss, I will answer for her speedy return into the room."

Immediately, the old house rang with merry screams and laughter. Young and old were literally in arms, in a moment, and almost every man in the company was found struggling with his apparently restive, but in reality nowise unwilling victim for a place beneath the mistletoe bough. Arthur Maitland was seen jumping over chairs, and running round tables, after Mary Wildman, and Frankum, with his accustomed tact and gallantry, led the giver of the feast beneath the tree, and startled every one by the sonorous smack of his hearty kiss; which action was greeted by a round of boisterous cheers, given by the lookers on. Even the stranger, Mr. Barrow, joined in the noisy fun, by rifling the rich lips of at least two or three of the country fair.

As soon as this form of the evening's mirth abated—this first brisk *fusillade* of kisses had somewhat ceased, and only a dropping occasional fire continued, the general attention,

again, reverted to the blazing faggot on the hearth, and a rigid scrutiny of the binds which had already given way took place, as for each one of these a fresh jug of ale was due. Then began mutual toasts, anecdotes, rural witticisms, and practical jokes. A young fellow, on whom the potent drink was taking premature effect, had his head powdered and his face blackened with a burnt cork; while a second was invited to sit down, after returning thanks for his health having been drunk, and found, to his astonishment, his chair had withdrawn itself during his brief harangue.

An hour or two wore away, at the end of which time a pause in the fun took place, preparatory to the supper being placed upon the board; after which dancing and other Christmas games would commence. It was during this interval that Mary recollected the circumstance of her having met a stranger in the valley, shortly before young Maitland overtook

her, and made her forget everything else. This fact she imparted to Mr. Frankum, expressing as she did so, much uneasiness respecting the possible danger to Crazy Kate.

Now Frankum was, at the moment, just in the right humour for encountering peril and cold weather, as he, too, was somewhat flushed with his potations, so he at once proposed to Arthur Maitland that they should, in consideration of another kiss each, pay an immediate visit to the old woman's cottage, promising to return in good time for the supper. To this proposal Arthur, of course, very readily agreed; and Mr. Barrow having begged to be allowed to accompany them, the three set out together. It is proper to say that Arthur had, already, conceived, though he knew not why, a dislike for this new acquaintance sufficiently strong to make him wish to be without his company; but as his friend Frankum hailed the accession to

the party with so much delight, he could offer no objection.

While this trio are making their way towards the wood, we must, for a while, retrace our steps, to recount earlier events in our narrative.

CHAPTER VIII.

But hold you, Dick, the poor soul has one foot in the grave.

Dibdin.

The stranger whom Mary Wildman had met, as before described, had his reasons for not questioning her as to the path he should follow. As she suspected, however, he was on his way to the abode of Crazy Kate, of the situation of which he was, notwithstanding, and very unfortunately for his purpose, quite ignorant.

Having entered the outskirts of the wood, he found two tracks inviting his pursuit, and greatly was he puzzled to decide which was the proper one for him to adopt. The one was marked with recent foot prints, the other covered with untrodden snow. He knew that Kate was not likely to be troubled with many visitors, and, therefore, conjecturing that the newly used path was more likely to conduct him away from, than to her humble dwelling, he selected the virgin way and at once struck into it. But like many of the ways of life, though seemingly the fairest to the eye, it was not the correct one, and led him far from the spot he desired to reach. Having walked on for some time, without lighting upon the hovel, he branched off, at random, in a fresh direction, which he pursued for another quarter of an hour, with no better success than had before attended him. Daylight was now all but gone, and the stranger, despairing of finding his way, halted to hear if he could distinguish any

sounds, and to bethink him how he ought to act, in such difficult circumstances. Presently, as he stood on the boundary of the wood, opposite the point at which he had entered it, he heard the song of a rustic who was crossing an adjacent field. When the singer had approached within a convenient distance, the stranger hailed him familiarly, and received an answer:

"Who be you a-wanting me? I can't stay now, or I'll be too late home with the holly, and get no supper."

"Stuff and nonsense, plenty of time; come here a minute. I've something to ask you."

The boor reluctantly consented, more than once demanding, as he drew nigh, if the person who summoned him were "Roger" or "Dick" or "Phil;" but no reply was vouchsafed him; still he advanced until he came close to the low hedge which encircled the wood, now filled, gloomily, with the shade of night.

"Now then, who be you, and what is it you want with me?"

"Can you tell me, my man," said the stranger, suddenly springing to the cope of the boundary fence, and confronting his unwilling listener, "where it is, in this old wood, that 'Crazy Kate' dwells?"

The person thus questioned was a tall, loutish youth of some twenty years of age, whose horror and alarm on discovering that he had, however much against his will, obeyed the call neither of Roger, Dick, nor Phil, but that of a perfect stranger, could not have been greater, possibly, had the old gentleman himself as unexpectedly made his appearance before him. Every hair on his head stiffened, as he wheeled about in his fright, to seek the protection of the open and better lighted field that lay behind him.

"Stay, stay, don't run away my lad, I'm not going to eat you, stupid," shouted the stranger after him. All in vain, no earthly persuasion could avail to arrest his flight. Forgetful of all pains and penalties, loss of

supper and everything besides, the boor dropped his burden of red berry bestarred holly, and fled with all the speed compatible with clouted shoes and deep snow. The involuntary cause of his terror re-entered the wood, laughing at the lad's cowardice, and with the determination of endeavouring, if possible, to regain the original point of his difficulty. This in itself was no easy task, but time and patience eventually accomplished it, and now, deigning to follow the little pathway he had previously rejected, the tired stranger was not long in arriving at his intended destination.

A dim light was struggling through the lattice window, as he knocked at the low door. Kate's voice bade him enter, and raising the latch he obeyed the invitation. One half, at least, of the small apartment was hid in comparative darkness, so that the old woman, as she sat up in bed, had to elevate the dreary candle some distance above her head, in order

to distinguish, even imperfectly, the person and features of her unexpected visitor.

"A stranger here, and at night too! For the love of God, do me no harm! it is not usual for me to be afeard or timid like, but, my friend, I am now weak and ill, and I hope dying. Leave me to my misery. Let me rot in quiet among the dead leaves of Autumn, strewed thick around me."

"You've nothing to fear from me, mother; I come to say a merry Christmas to you. Cheer up, cheer up, I've seen your son, Dick Morrison. I'm an old shipmate of his. He still loves you, mother, with all his heart and wished me to tell you so."

The old woman, leaning upon her elbow in the bed, moodily shook her drooping head as she replied:

"No, no, that can't be, for my poor Dick has long since forgotten his old mother. In sin I bore him, and in guilt I fear he lives, like

me. To these parts he can never, again, return, even after long years, and when my grave may have grown mossy with time. Yet, if you really know him and would take pity on me, I have a secret you might convey perhaps would be of comfort to him. Will you faithfully do so?"

And the speaker raised her eyes, in which strong excitement was beginning to glow, to the face of her unknown visitor. As she did so, she half started at a sudden thought called into her mind by the resemblance which she fancied it bore to that of her own son. But the stranger betrayed no symptoms of recognition, adding merely:

"Yes, mother, you can depend upon me; what is your secret?"

"You will ask no question about the message I shall give you for my son?"

"None, if you don't wish it."

"Then first tell Dick, that all he may have heard, fifteen years ago, about my guilt, is false.

as heaven is true. And say, also, to him, that neither am I the mad old witch that people take me for. It's all sin—and misery for sin, and nothing more."

"Mother, mother!" exclaimed the stranger unable any longer to retain his disguise, yet hardly knowing how to reveal himself with safety to the poor old woman, who lay weak and emaciated before him, "thank God, mother, you can give poor Dick this comforting message of your innocence. He, too, is accused of having had a hand in murder, but—"

"Murder!" ejaculated Kate, looking up, with a terrified gaze, how do you know I spoke of murder—I never said so."

"Be steady, be quiet, mother—my poor old mother! Your secret is safe. There—now you know me—I am Dick himself come back to you," and the son removed the cap which concealed the upper part of his face. Kate now knew him instantly; but looking fixedly at him, she observed, in a low voice, while he took both her hands in his—

"Why, Dick, how old you look! Oh, God! and have I been all these years in my misery, alone, and without you—you, my own poor child of sin and crime!"

"Sinful enough, mother, no doubt, but no murderer. Come, cheer up! Now take a taste of this—'twill strengthen you, and then we can better talk of what I've come to tell you of."

The woman did as she was bidden, and placed her lips to the mouth of a small bottle which her son took from his pocket for her. This done, the conversation continued as follows:

"Mother, I have always felt, within myself, that you could not, by any means, have been concerned in poor Wildman's murder; yet when I heard it said you had, formerly, known Ramsay, though of that you had never told me, and when, again, I heard how that you spoke to him before the magistrates, and he seemed to fear you more than he did them, I could not tell what to think about it—and I fled to

sea, lest I, who did know something of the deed, should bring worse suspicions upon you, when known to be your son. Only for this reason, and I should long ago have thrown some light upon a secret which so many, in these parts, are waiting to be told at last upon a death-bed—the death-bed of Isaac Ramsay. Yes, mother, I am come back to hang Ramsay, even though the doing it should cost me my own life too. But why do you start so? You are innocent—never fear for me."

"Dick, Dick!" exclaimed the old woman, clutching the coat collar of her son, "if Ramsay can only reach the gallows tree through your means, there he must never, shall never go!"

A terrible doubt again crossed the mind of the listener—one that so fast took the shape of actual conviction as to drive him in a moment into despair and fierceness.

"Come, come," he said, in a louder and a very different tone of voice from that he had

before employed in the scene, "I will not be paltered with, even by you. The murderer shall hang, though you and I both accompany him. Why should I save either you or him?"

"Because—oh, God! forgive me Dick—because I am your mother, and Isaac Ramsay is your own father!"

"I see, I see how it is, old woman; you are then guilty; yet, I will save you if I can; but mind, I want you to tell me no lies for an inducement. I with Ramsay's blood in me! If I had it, 'twould rise against you now, and strangle you in your miserable bed, mother as you are. Now tell me, and beware how you lie again to me, how were you concerned in that murder of the farmer? You were not near when it was committed, for I myself was the only witness of it. No matter, at present, how or wherefore, but I, alone, was present on that stormy night, when Isaac Ramsay shot poor Wildman. It all took place while I was by, but—"

At this important point of their discussion, the speakers were interrupted by the sudden breaking in of an old and unused door, at the farther end of the hovel, the rusty hinges of which having given way, owing to some pressure applied from without, the whole of the rotten and decrepid barrier came tumbling with a loud crash into the apartment, and bearing with it in its fall the body of a man, holding a pistol in his right hand, which coming in contact with the floor luckily discharged, thereby considerably adding to the alarm and confusion of the moment, but fortunately without doing any more serious injury. Poor Kate, whose nerves had been already overtaxed by the interview we have described, fell senseless on her pillow, while her son drew a loaded horse pistol, from the bosom of his thick coat, in readiness to defend himself.

CHAPTER IX.

P. Henry. Content;—and the argument shall be thy running away.

Fal. Ah! no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me.

First part of "*King Henry IV.*"

It must ever be a leading object of the endeavours of those who undertake to write a tale to avoid, as much as possible, everything like retrogression in their narratives. And yet there are times when no ingenuity on the

writer's part can get over this cardinal impediment to the smoothness and facility of his style. We have here, or we are greatly mistaken, a case in point; for without going back a little way with our readers, we should find it impossible, clearly, to explain the interruption which happened at the conclusion of the last chapter, to the scene between Crazy Kate and her son.

We need scarcely say that when Frankum, Mr. Barrow, and Arthur Maitland quitted the Christmas party, on their errand to the abode of the weird *protègèe* of Mary Wildman, they lost no time in making their way thither.

The night was intensely cold, and the air so frosty, that the long, tremulous, bright rays of myriads of stars reached down from the depths of the glorious sky and lighted up the glistening surface of the crisp and crackling snow with a radiance as freezingly cold as that which shines from arctic planets. It was not a night for sauntering; your breath, as it escaped, grew pris-

matic in the starlight, and froze into tiny icicles on your eye lids. The old wood, with its many trees still laden with a weight of snow, which gave to them a variety of grotesque and curious, and beautiful forms, was soon attained. The little party halted within a few paces of Kate's dwelling, and were a good deal surprised to hear voices, in earnest debate, proceeding from it. What did that mean? The old woman had a visitor or visitors; but whom, or of what kind?

The human voice has, for humanity, its terrors as well as its consolations. That of the judge, with the black cap on, speaking the words of doom to the poor, dizzy culprit, every pore of whose body seems an ear to hear with, though the fatal meaning is but half understood by him, must be a terrible, a dreadful voice, as incredible, almost, to him who is addressed by it, as would be a voice speaking to him from another world. But without staying to consider all the occasions on which speech may be supposed to

be most appaling, we may remark that it was by no means either agreeable or comforting as listened to in the present instance. The heart of young Maitland, though not at all a very faint one, beat against his bosom so fast and obtrusively as to interfere with his power of hearing as distinctly as he could wish—while at the same time Frankum cut short, in the middle, an interesting narrative, which he was eagerly pouring into the ear of Mr. Barrow, and stood still as a stone, his mouth still partially open, and his breathing painfully thick and audible. The latter gentleman alone felt quite at his ease, and able to give all his attention to what was thus strangely passing so near to him.

When danger is at hand, he who is the youngest by many years of those who are called upon to face it must be a great coward if he be not the first to propose some daring movement against the common enemy. Now Arthur Maitland was, certainly, no coward, and ac-

cordingly he was about to rush, at once, into the cottage, and perhaps the lion's mouth, when Mr. Barrow prudently pulled him back.

"What are you going to do?"

"Enter the house, and find out who is there besides the old woman."

"Stay, stay, Hotspur, it may be of more consequence to us to learn what is being said, than who the speakers are. Do either of you know the voice now heard?"

"One voice!" observed Frankum, "I'll swear I heard half-a-dozen."

"Then perhaps," replied Mr. Barrow, "as you have ears so superior to ours, Mr. Frankum, you had better creep, alone, to the door, and let us know what is going forward, within."

"What for, what good would that do? No, sir," proceeded the aspirant to the magisterial seat, "I hate eaves-dropping, and I shall certainly not so commit myself, alone; I act in company."

"I see, clearly, you are a cautious man—Your character is at stake, but Mr. Maitland and I have no such withholding scruples to deter us. Come, let us two go forward, then."

Saying this, he took a small pistol from his pocket, cocked it, and advanced towards the hovel. Arthur followed.

"Mr. Barrow," said Frankum, "for God's sake take care what you do. Let us act legally —Arthur, my boy, be advised; this is all contrary to law. We are going to act *vi et armis* instead of—"

"Instead of acting on the defensive, and returning home like cowards, as you would persuade us to do, Frankum," replied Arthur.

But Frankum, in the face of his own counsels, still accompanied his friends, rather than risk the danger of a retreat alone, however legal that course might appear to him.

"Mr. Barrow, my good sir," again he pleaded in favour of peace, "don't trust your-

self with fire-arms, consider, in a moment of rashness, what might happen. Allow me to take the pistol."

"Curse the fellow," observed Mr. Barrow to Arthur Maitland, "he's as frightened as a girl. There take the pistol, sir, and be silent, if you can muster up courage enough to keep your teeth from chattering."

Being now possessed of a means of defence, Frankum displayed something like resolution; and it is very certain that, thus armed, he was by far the most dangerous member of the little storming party, for, at the first shadow of danger, he would be sure to lodge the contents of his pistol somewhere. A rat in a corner is about the most to be dreaded of animals.

By this time, Arthur and Mr. Barrow had applied their ears to the crevices of the old, moss-covered door of the little building, and were both soon aware that the conversation taking place, within, was one of deep importance. Around the corner, at one end of the dwelling,

was another door, long unused, and against which were piled up, in a very ricketty and insecure manner, a number of logs of wood and dry stumps of trees, intended for fuel; and it was on the top of this rude provision against the severe cold of winter, that our friend, Frankum, took his stand, with the double view of removing himself as far as possible out of harm's way, in any event that might ensue, and of more conveniently performing the hitherto despised part of a prying eaves-dropper. We must also add, that his position for listening to what was passing was the best chosen of the three, inasmuch as the top of the door, which had once been filled with glass, the better to light the cottage, was now fain to content itself with an imperfect stopping of rags and straw, so that the sound of voices very easily penetrated through it.

Our party being thus disposed, the first words that reached the ears of Frankum were those employed by Dick Morrison, when he de-

clared that he had expressly returned from sea to bring Ramsay to the gallows, for the crime of murder which he had committed. The general import of this statement was, likewise, seized both by Mr. Barrow and Arthur, though far less clearly; yet they understood sufficient of what was said to arouse all their curiosity, and powerfully fix their attention. It was now that Frankum's old, fond dream, respecting the magistracy, again recurred to him. Here was a fresh opportunity afforded him. Could he but be instrumental in tearing away the shroud of mystery which had, for such a length of time, hung over the sudden disappearance of Alick Wildman, his reward would, certainly, be a place in the commission of the peace. All fear had rapidly vanished from his thoughts, his only anxiety now depending on a crowd of doubts as to whether it would be wiser for him quietly to remove the rag stoppings, and, at once, so far maim the supposed accomplice of Ramsay as to make sure of capturing him af-

terwards, or to descend, enter the house, pistol in hand, and arrest him, in the name of the King, on his own confession of participation in a foul and diabolical murder. The hero and patriot were every instant growing greater and greater in the breast of Frankum, when Dick Morrison uttered these words, so fraught with terrible significance:—

"No matter, at present, how or wherefore, but I, alone, was present on that stormy night, when Isaac Ramsay shot poor Wildman. It all took place while I was by; but——"

In his excitement, the listener forgot his ticklish position, and made a sudden move for the purpose of decisively quitting it, when the logs began to shift beneath him, his weight was thrown against the frail, half-rotten door, the rust-eaten hinges of which were too weak to support a load so considerable, and giving way under it, the absurd catastrophe occurred, which we have before described. It may be easily imagined how great was the consterna-

tion caused by it; and, perhaps, except Frankum himself, no one felt more momentary alarm and astonishment than his two companions, Barrow and Arthur Maitland.

The reader will remember the formidable attitude of defence into which the man Morrison threw himself, at the end of the last chapter; and, from what we have just been saying, he may naturally suppose that, before such a grave and ugly menace, Frankum would prudently tremble for his personal safety. But if he thinks so, he makes the very greatest mistake, for instead of flinching from the pistol which was pointed at him, our friend regained his presence of mind and his legs at the same moment, and levelling the weapon which he held in his hand, (which, by the bye, he had hastily re-cocked in the confusion of the moment,) he told the man before him, with tolerable coolness, that he must request him immediately to surrender himself as his prisoner.

"I have missed my aim once, it is true," said he, "but if you compel me to fire again, you are a dead man. I, Sir," added he, by way of strengthening his authority as much as possible, "am a justice of the peace, and I arrest you, on my own warrant, as an accomplice in the crime of murder."

Here Arthur and Mr. Barrow entered the apartment, and Frankum, cheered by their presence, hastened to consummate his bravery, and their amazement, by boldly advancing towards his captive, to take him into actual custody.

"Stir another foot," exclaimed the latter, "or interfere with my leaving this house, and I'll send you to kingdom come, without your prayers said—stand back!" he added moving towards the door. "There, then, take that! and again the place resounded to the loud report of another pistol shot. But the hand which drew the trigger was held some feet above the head which it might, otherwise, have

easily shattered to pieces. Frankum staggered backwards, against the wall, and Arthur, thinking that another murder had been perpetrated, attempted to impede the exit of the fancied assassin; for which honorable endeavour he received a blow, from a clenched fist, that laid him sprawling on the floor, after the delivery of which, the powerful bestower vanished, without delay, from the scene of action, Mr. Barrow, all the while, looking on with very singular and inexplicable unconcern.

In a few seconds more, Arthur Maitland arose, half stunned, from the ground, with his eyes still emitting sparks of fire, dancing stars and other phosphoric lights; and Frankum managed, with great incredulity, to convince himself that no amount of lead, however small, had passed through, or even penetrated, any part of his valuable personality.

"Now, gentlemen," said Barrow, when the smoke had cleared away, "what are we to do next? This woman must not be left here

alone, seeing she is closely connected with the man who has just escaped us. If you will return to the farm and send a competent guard to take charge of her during the night, I will myself remain with her until such persons shall arrive. But first allow me to reload that pistol of mine, which you have been using, Mr. Frankum:" and the speaker took a small powder flask from his breast pocket, for the purpose. It contained everything necessary; powder, ball, and caps. This done, Frankum and Arthur set out on their return, and Mr. Barrow remained behind to witness the slow revival to consciousness, and then to speech, of crazy Kate. What afterwards passed between these two persons need not, now, be told the reader; he will be informed of its tenor at a later period of our tale. At present, it is sufficient for us to say, that Barrow faithfully kept his word, and only quitted Kate when he had given her into the custody of the village constable and a couple of extemporized

assistants. Then, and not till then, he walked back, alone, to the farm, where all was again in something like the alarm and confusion that had reigned there, some sixteen years previously.

CHAPTER X.

At Christmas be merry, *and thankful withal,*
And feast thy poor neighbours, the great with the small.

Tusser.

The following was the morning of Christmas-day; the sun shone brightly over the snowy landscape, and the happy peasantry assembled at Ackworth Hall, at the good Rector's, and at the various larger farm houses, to enjoy a substantial breakfast, and again drink a welcome to the festive season, in flagons of

spiced toast and ale. How beautiful are these scenes of rural Christmas rejoicing! How much of the strength, bravery and glory of old England has lain concealed in these popular customs. May young England be as proud and as happy when they are entirely obliterated! May the coming "equality" of all classes unite the nation's hands as firmly as the bygone system of mutual dependence and protection has done! May this great law of universal nature peaceably, meekly and advantageously make way for the better and more *man-worthy* arrangements of a certain class of modern reformers! There were no excesses committed, nor any riotous or loud mirthfulness encouraged, at these Christmas morning banquets. The gladness that prevailed at them became the day—it was deep, intense and brotherly, but subdued and sober. Those who had been meeting each other the year through, amid the common-place of daily routine, now exchanged greetings with the lively feelings of

friends long seperated, but once more reunited. For a few hours, at least, the world seemed suddenly to have grown young again, even to the aged, who, as the revered witnesses of many Christmases, received, be it remarked, the especial and affectionate attentions of the young, at this humanizing season. From this simple undoubted fact let the old learn that, if they would be duly honored by the generations which are springing up around them, they should do all in their power (and they have many opportunities) to diffuse joy and gladness over the scenes in which they mingle. It is not the joy of youth so much as its sadness that overlooks the respect and tenderness which are due to age. But we digress—On the occasion here alluded to, the different companies of breakfasters, assembled at the houses we have specified, were unusually numerous. The household servants looked extra tidy, smiling, gay, and happy, and the day labourers came dressed in their "Sunday's best," and with many a rub of their hardy, honest palms, valiantly de-

clared, in the very teeth of a biting frost, that it was certainly beautiful weather for Christmas time.

At the Rectory, good old Mr. Greville welcomed his humble guests in person, and then said grace among them before they commenced their meal. And what heartfelt blessings were invoked, by his loving flock, upon the venerable white head of that faithful, watchful, worthy pastor!

At Ackworth Hall, Major Grimshaw did the honors of the breakfast table with little grace, it is true, but no ill intentions. He went so far as to offer his dependents a few words of unostentatious advice; begged them, as they were going to Church, to be discreet in the use of his ale, and not to take so much of it as would either render them sleepy or incapable of remembering the text. The major, indeed, had a firm conviction that the whole duty of a churchman lay in carefully remembering the text, both chapter and verse.

It was at this stage of the proceedings, at

the Hall, that Mrs. Grimshaw, and her two daughters, accompanied by a stranger, made their appearance among the feasting peasantry. We need scarcely tell the reader, after informing him, as we have long ago done, of the invitation given by the Grimshaws to Ernest de Lisle, in the theatre in London, that the stranger was no other than that gentleman. And great was the curiosity he excited by his presence. But De Lisle had the happy knack of making himself friends in an incredibly short space of time, and he now succeeded so well, by addressing a cordial and comprehensible remark to one, and asking a merry question of another of the little company, of poor men, around him, that, in the space of ten minutes, he had rendered himself a very great, if not a universal favorite there.

And now, the breakfasts over, the happy recipients take their way towards the parish church. From over stiles and down lanes, across the white fields, and by the high-hedged

narrow roads half filled with snow, they reach the churchyard, where the graves are all obliterated, the erect tomb-stones, with the words, "here lieth," engraven on them, alone appearing, and the little grey church itself, even to its low, square tower, partially enveloped by the bright mantle that covers all things.

The rural churchyard is in most counties, but particularly in Devonshire, a place where a vast deal of hebdomadal gossip is carried on. The farmers stand in groups, awaiting the parson and the closing chime of the Sabbath bells, and, then and there, discuss their crops, their flocks, and the chances of the weather. At last the rector, vicar, or curate, as the case may be, arrives among them, watch in hand, when all heads are, for a moment, respectfully bared before him. And then the ancient sundial is hastily consulted, the clerk peeps impatiently from the low porch, the clash of the bells ceases, the congregation enter the

venerable building, the lately animated yard becomes, again, as quiet as the graves which it contains, the church doors close, and, as the jack-daws resettle themselves in the niches of the antique tower, the faint soft murmur of the praying flock is heard, following the simple accents of the good pastor.

On the morning we have been describing, the little knots of assembling parishioners were greedily listening to all the new and strange reports, then current, about the light that had been so suddenly thrown upon the fate of poor Wildman. But this, though by far the nearest approach to an actual discovery of the supposed murder, was not the first alarm spread abroad respecting it. At various times, rumours of the unexpected finding of a skeleton, the dying confession of an obscure and forgotten person, once belonging to the neighbourhood, or some other equally startling circumstance, had caused the greatest temporary

consternation; and, whenever this occurred, Ramsay always came forward, in some peculiarly bold manner, again to confront suspicion and dare public accusation. Such was the policy he adopted in this instance. When the congregation were seated, attentively listening to that beautiful second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, a portion of which is read by our church as the second lesson in the morning service, on Christmas-day, and their hearts were touched by the sublimity of that angelic and glorious proclamation "For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," Isaac Ramsay walked up the aisle and took his seat on a bench placed near the communion table. And then, when the lesson was concluded, and the people rose, all eyes were fixed upon him—an old grey-headed, powerfully framed, care worn looking man. There he stood, with his bald forehead raised, and his sunken, fierce expres-

sioned grey eyes glancing defiance around him. Perhaps many half wondered, in their own minds that heaven's lightning did not flash forth and strike him dead upon the spot he had come to desecrate by his blood-stained presence; but when Mr. Greville, in his sermon, accidentally alluded to the manner in which the tares and the wheat are, by God, allowed to grow up together until the harvest, the remarks were seized upon as a designed explanation of the mystery of divine forbearance.

Ah, poor, pre-judged criminal, why didst thou enter there (with no feeling of repentance in thine heart as a passport) to destroy the humility of a whole congregation of fellow sinners, by affording them a chance of viewing their own iniquities as almost cancelled by a mere comparsion with thy supposed enormously greater crime. But this is the way of the world generally; the measure of their virtue is the sliding scale of other people's vices.

It was a sad interruption to the religious happiness of that resplendent Christmas day, in this quiet little rural church. Ramsay's presence, there, mocked the gladness of the boughs of laurel and red berried holly with which it was gracefully decked. Old and young felt ill at ease; the church-wardens officially scowled upon the intruder, but they had no power to expel him; Major Grimshaw and his great book reversed their accustomed standing position, in the unnecessarily large red baize pew appropriated to the devotions of the Ackworth Hall family; and even Mr. Greville appeared slightly disturbed in the performance of his familiar duty, to the extent at least, as some of his hearers asserted, of laying peculiar stress on certain parts of the prayers for deliverance from flagrant sin, and of emphasizing, with very obvious nervousness, the word "murder" in the sixth commandment. And well he might, for Ramsay, standing within a few feet of the reader, was audibly repeating the

responses after him. At the end of the service, the old man started, abruptly, from his seat, to the great consternation of many persons who fancied he was going to speak, snatched the long heavy staff with which he always walked, drew himself up to his full height, while his thin lips, for a second or two, inarticulately moved, and then quitted the church, through a clear avenue made for him to pass, by the retiring congregation.

CHAPTER XI.

Gab.—First who accuses me?
Seig.————————All things
If not all men: the universal rumour.
Werner.

We won't go home till morning.
Song.

Four days later, came that most disagreeable of all the changes incidental to winter weather, a sudden and complete thaw, after deep snow. The very globe seems dissolving, and, in sympathy with the liquefaction of all around it, the human body grows comfortless, damp and

clammy. The very dryest of old houses fall into a kind of cold sweat—the walls running with moisture, and the doors and furniture covered as it were with a mortal perspiration. In this instance, the change was so rapid that in eight and forty hours the landscape had thrown aside its robe of white, and shone forth with virginal splendour, in its native green.

It was soon after this peculiarly soft and open weather had set in, that Ramsay, who had some few years previously commenced business as a small farmer, was one bright forenoon following his plough, in gloomy thoughtfulness, as it turned up the black earth on a piece of lately redeemed waste land, in the neighbourhood, when he was tapped on the shoulder by Barrow, who had approached him unobserved.

"Good morning Ramsay; excuse the interruption; I wish to speak with you. Nay,

don't stop your horses, I will walk by your side. My name is Barrow; probably by this time you are acquainted with it."

"Yes, you contradicted the nonsense, about me, sworn to, the other morning before the magistrates, by yon Squire Frankum, the biggest fool in all the parish."

"I did, and I have now come to you for my reward for doing so. One good turn, you know, always deserves another, eh?"

"Why sir," replied Ramsay, eyeing his questioner with the attention of incipient alarm, "a gentleman, I'm told, speaks the truth as naturally as he draws his breath, and can't therefore need to be rewarded for his pains, or I should rather say for what is often done with great pains by poor men like me and many others."

"Come, come my old friend, I am not here to trouble you with my gentility—I've come on business, hark you."

"Business of what kind?"

"Of a kind not quite unfamiliar to you—I want to be rid of a man that's in my way; and you must help to remove him. Will you do so?"

"What in the devil's name!" exclaimed the old man dropping the reins of his team, and raising the iron plough scraper in a menacing manner, "do you mean by that word? Are strangers to come to me and call me murderer, too? Off you hound, or, old as I am, I'll scatter your brains upon the furrow."

"Wait a bit, Ramsay, don't be rash," replied the other, stepping back a pace and producing the small pistol which he always carried, even to church when he went there, "wait a second, old man, I'm better provided than Wildman was, do you see."

Ramsay saw that he was foiled, and the last words of the speaker cowed him more than even the pistol had done. He resumed his place at the plough tail, and Mr. Barrow his, beside him.

"Now," observed the latter, "that little explanation may save us a deal of trouble in future; but I will add one more word to it—You are in my power; I can hang or save you, as I please."

"I never committed the crime I am charged with, and that you know, or why did you gainsay the other morning's slander?"

"Because if I had not, Mr. Frankum's evidence would have set on foot other enquiries which would have eventually given your neck to the halter, and that would not suit my purposes. Again I ask you, will you serve me?"

"No, d—n me if I do—I believe you are sent from the devil to mislead and lose me. Do as you please, I'll have no concern with you."

For several yards, the two followed after the plough in silence, and then Barrow spoke again:

"Look you, Ramsay, you cannot deceive me; I have proofs against you that you know not of. Trust me, and do as I shall direct

and you are quite safe. I know the quarter whence you are threatened with the gallows, even in your old age—and I can, if you obey me, remove that danger for ever. Look now, to show you that I feel convinced I have your life in my hands, I will place my own in yours."

The speaker stopped, took out his pocket-book, and wrote the following on a blank leaf:

"I hereby acknowledge and declare that I have incited Isaac Ramsay to take away the life of Edward Wildman, the only son of the missing Alick Wildman, late of Knowle-water Barton, in the manner, and according to the plan prescribed by me—

"Signed

"Matthew Barrow.

"January 18—."

"There," said he, placing the terrible docu-

ment in the hands of Ramsay, "if now you are an innocent man, I am at your mercy. But you dare not move, I tell you, except at my bidding. Come, we are friends; I am the only man, alive, into whose face you can look with comfort. I too am a murderer, in this, old man. Be easy, do as I wish you, be safe, be satisfied. Let us shake hands!"

A dreadful light gleamed in Ramsay's eyes; he held out his hand, which Barrow eagerly seized, and shook it warmly—bad men can shake hands warmly.

"And now, my friend," continued the latter, "I will fully explain to you my wishes. To guarantee the concealment of your crime, and satisfy me, two persons must be got out of our way, and in a manner that shall render their return impossible. In a word, they must perish, and that speedily. Attend to me!" said the speaker, grasping the arm of Ramsay, who was already so far absorbed by the conversation that he was permitting the plough-share to

pursue a very devious and zig-zag line, through the rough, stony soil. "In the first place, every word that was sworn to before the magistrates was strictly true. The man, whoever he may have been, that was visiting Kate Morrison, declared to her, in my hearing, that he intended to get you hanged for the murder of Alick Wildman. He was by when you committed the deed, and would risk his own life to take away yours. I understand that you are the chief leader, in these parts, of the inland smuggling trade; I mean that you are first among those who receive the spirits, and other trifling matters, landed by certain well known vessels on yonder dangerous coast. Now, did not the "Petrel" sloop leave the bay on the morning of Christmas day?"

"She did."

"Well, I strongly suspect that your mortal enemy is her bold and crafty captain."

"Impossible! he is making hundreds by a business he could not well carry on without my

assistance. He is the best fellow that sails the wide seas."

"I will describe to you his person and dress."

And the speaker accurately sketched off the same figure which we some time since presented to the attention of the reader.

"The same; and yet it cannot, it cannot be he," said Ramsay.

"I tell you it is he, Isaac," replied the other, "and therefore the sooner he is quiet, the greater will be your safety."

"Well, and the second is young Wildman; why would you remove him?"

"For reasons of my own, which I need not now explain. He, too, has lately had a hand in the smuggling business, and that may facilitate my plans."

"And if I agree to help you, by what method do you propose to——?"

"That you shall learn all in good time. For the present, we can now confide in each

other. Look, Isaac, look, there are other sly things abroad, besides ourselves, my old friend. See, there goes a fox, at the bottom of the field. How low he is running, and how close to the hedge he keeps!"

And at that moment, a fox of immense size, and with an enormous brush, finely tipped with white, was to be seen dashing along across the fallow, followed in the air by two or three cawing, fluttering, noisy rooks, and half-a-dozen small birds. How often these feathered alarmists give a useful hint to the huntsman many a "sly Reynard" has known to his cost.

"Yes," said Ramsay, after taking a momentary glance at the animal, "and if the hounds of mankind were following us, as closely as that fox is now followed by the pack, we should think ourselves happy if the earth-stoppers had left a single hole open for us to hide ourselves in. Hark! I hear the notes of the bugle! Now, sir, we had better part; or stay, help me in giving him the loud 'tally-

ho.' I'll join the chase. *Tally-ho! tally-ho!*"

And while Barrow slunk away across the ploughed land, old Isaac Ramsay, (partly to avoid the possible danger of any one having observed their interview, and partly seduced by his natural love of field-sports,) continuing, from time to time, to shout "tally-ho," with a strong, sonorous, and prolonged note, detached his horses from the plough, and, turning one of them adrift in the field, mounted the bare back of the other, a wiry looking, mettlesome animal, and stood in readiness to join the field, whenever they should come galloping up. Nor had he long to wait, for his shouts having been heard by the master of the hounds, he had thrown his pack forward in the direction thus indicated, and the dogs again taking the scent, which a flock of sheep had for a time foiled, they were soon once more in full cry, and came on, with raised

noses and straight tails, to the very spot where Ramsay was expecting them.

"Tally-ho, hark forward, boys!" again called the old man, with some difficulty reining in the spirited nag on which he rode. Meanwhile the horn was winding forth its merry notes, to which a series of irregular hills sent back their echoes; and a few minutes later, a large number of well mounted horsemen, many of them in scarlet coats, came thundering into the field.

"Are the dogs right?" asked the huntsman.

"Quite right, Sir," replied Ramsay, "and the fox only ten minutes a head of them."

First and foremost, among these gallant sportsmen, rode our friend Frankum, dressed as usual in his green coat and white breeches. He was mounted on a horse of a very singular and striking appearance. It was a kind of rusty brown looking animal, rather low in the

back and pinched in the belly, with what is termed in stable language "a rat's tail," (that is to say a tail rather deficient in hair) a pair of hocks turned in, after the fashion of an in-kneed man, a long, well crested neck, and a large, ill-proportioned, Roman-nosed head. When the spurs were applied to him, which was almost incessantly, for Frankum was a great fidget with his heels and always spurred as far back in the flanks of his horse as he could well reach, the aforesaid rat's tail had a curious habit of describing a series of rapid circles around its own centre, in answer to the teazing steel; and the animal greatly increased the odd effect of this peculiarity by, at the same time, laying his long ears flat upon his neck, which gave to him altogether an expression of remarkable wickedness and cunning. It was thus that he took all his most desperate leaps; frequently amid the loud laughter of a baffled and astonished field. This celebrated hunter bore the proud name of "Coronet," which his

master invariably pronounced "Kurranit,"—"old Kurranit,"—"Kurranit my lad,"—"Kurranit you thief;" which last expression the sagacious and eccentric quadruped seemed perfetly to comprehend, and generally showed how much he felt himself scandalized by it, by an attempt either to bite his slanderer's toe, or hurl him from his saddle by a hearty kick: a circumstance which rendered it exceedingly dangerous to be very near, when Frankum and his horse had a quarrel. Near to them, in the present instance, rode Ernest De Lisle, upon a fine, half bred, bay mare; and evidently greatly amused by the whole appearance and manner of this extraordinary pair.

Onward, then, swept the pack, and the entire field after them. It was a beautiful and cheering sight to see them racing across that magnificent landscape, now steaming, fetlock deep, through the brown, heavy ploughed lands, and now emerging upon a green field and resuming their original, dashing, wind-like speed;

now clearing a bushy fence, four or five abreast, now topping a hill and for awhile lost to sight, and then coming again into view and tailing off, one after another, into a long, irregular file of riders, until at last the eye gradually loses sight of them altogether, with the exception of a few stragglers who have come to a dead stand still, and remain wistfully watching, from the different surrounding heights, the forward career of their more fortunate and happy companions.

At the end of the second hour, Frankum still led the chase. There were himself, the huntsman, De Lisle, Arthur Maitland, the magistrate's clerk (whom the reader will remember to have met before in this narrative) and old Isaac Ramsay; the rest were "no where."

A great tract of country had been already passed, in the hot pursuit, and the hounds were fast running into their game. Every time that the fox was now tally-ho'd, it was found that

he was barely keeping himself out of view of the driving pack. Twenty minutes more and his drabbled brush would be held up in some fortunate hand, as a proud trophy! It was a downright race, who should be first in at the death. The frequent hedges were got over in most gallant style. At length a stone fence of considerable height presented itself — the magistrates' clerk bounded at it with great spirit, but his tired horse fell back with him into the soft mud of the ditch, and over him flew, one, two, three, four, five, of his recent companions. On they spurred, the fox fully in sight of the pack, and slackening his pace every step he went. A few seconds afterwards the leading hound fastened upon his brush, and all was over with him. Old Ramsay was the first to raise the dead animal above the open, baying mouths of his savage pursuers. Frankum was the second man in.

"Farmer," said De Lisle, coming in third, "what price will you take for that splendid

nag of yours? I never saw so clever a fencer. And you are more wonderful than your horse, even. Why, where did you learn your riding, and how is it that a grey headed old fellow, like you, has been able to shame all of us? Favor me with your name, good farmer, and I hope we shall meet again."

All this was said so rapidly, that none of the party had any opportunity to arrest De Lisle's compliments.

"My name is Isaac Ramsay, sir," was the reply, and the young sportsman started in his saddle, at the unexpected announcement. His felicitations were ended, for of course he had heard all about Ramsay. But taking out his purse he threw him a crown-piece and then rode off in another direction.

The old man, having taken possession of the fox's brush and drawn it, like a flower, through the button holes of his fustian coat, also retired from the spot alone, and not in company, as he had arrived at it.

"Ah that old villain," observed Frankum, as the rest of the party rode homewards, "is the best rider, and has always the best horse in the county. The things that he has done, in the smuggling trade, are wonderful. He once rode bang over the Turnpike-gate at —— with two large kegs of brandy under him on the saddle; which I remember I called, at the time, a devilish spirited trick."

And Frankum laughed heartily, at what he considered to be the best pun he had ever made.

We must here inform the reader that the hunting party, we have thus described, was formed by Major Grimshaw for the especial enjoyment of his friend Ernest de Lisle. The hounds were not his own, nor had he ever kept any, but they belonged to a neighbouring 'Squire, and had been invited to meet on the Ackworth Hall estates, on this particular day. Coupled with this attention to his young guest, the major had given a general, and very press-

ing invitation to all the gentlemen who might join the hunt, on the occasion, to return to the Hall, and take their place at the dinner table, at the conclusion of the sport. And, to avoid all excuses and inconvenience, the visitors were requested to make no alteration in their dresses, but to come in those they had worn during the day, the major himself promising faithfully to set the example, at his own board. Thither we also must now repair, where, there is no doubt, we shall again fall in with most of those who lost their places in the early part of the recent chase.

The apartment in which the friends of Major Grimshaw assembled, on this occasion, was a large and somewhat ancient room, which from its great length, elevated, carved oaken ceiling, and portraited walls had much the appearance of a picture gallery. This, in reality, it was not, however, as in another of its wings, the hall could boast of a very fine specimen of that venerable kind of place generally devoted,

in most of the large houses of this country, in past years, exclusively to the art of painting. The floor, like the roof of this chamber, was of black oak, covering the middle of which, or that space which the dinner table occupied, was spread, in conformity with the increased effeminacy of modern times, a rich Turkey carpet. The chimney was broad and deep, and contained, within it, an enormous grate with polished bars, flanking which, at each end, sat the figure of an Egyptian Sphinx, also brilliantly burnished; and, catching thus the bright light of the flickering blaze, their hybrid faces appeared quite animated and expressive. The high mantel-piece was of finely carved wood, the lower third of the walls wainscoted, and the three windows, set in deep embrasures, reaching from the ceiling to the ground, were now closed in, comfortably, by the ornamental drapery of long sweeping crimson curtains. The whole was powerfully lighted up by sconces, placed between the family pictures, and three

tall silver lamps, burning upon the well laid table.

The party consisted entirely of gentlemen, the major presiding at the head, and a country relation of the family (who was so deaf as to be obliged to use an ear trumpet,) at the bottom of the hospitable board. We mention this relation of the host because, although the reader will probably never hear anything more of him, after this evening is over, he certainly was a characteristic figure during it. Like many deaf persons, who fancy that all around them must share in their infirmity, he talked very loudly, and never accepted an invitation to take wine until he had deliberately adjusted his trumpet, and compelled the person who asked him to repeat his words. He was, too, a petulant man, rated the footmen, and occasionally extended his ire even to Major Grimshaw himself, his remarks appearing doubly angry and personal from the inveterate habit, he had, of always insisting upon gathering, with the greatest accuracy,

every syllable of his relation's replies through the aforesaid irritating and troublesome trumpet, which he kept, ready for use, at his right hand, between the large old-fashioned silver salt stand and his own bottle of peculiar claret.

At length, after a solid and very sumptuous dinner had been partaken of, and the wine and fruits were set upon the table, the tall host rose to propose that which he never omitted, when he had an after dinner listener, namely, the health of his Majesty the King; for which loyal compliment paid to the Sovereign he, the Major, as a Magistrate, and, therefore, an official person also handsomely undertook to return his warmest thanks, as soon as the parliamentary "hear, hear" and "bravos" had subsided, and before he resumed his seat. The delicate sympathy manifested by the speaker, in the mutual compliments of these fine addresses, gave noble proof of the generosity of his nature, the loyalty of his opinions, and the elevation of his genius. It must not be supposed, by any

one, that his reply was a mere echo to his first speech; no, Major Grimshaw was by nature, perhaps, designed for a great debater, and it was edifying to hear the ingenuity with which he managed to combat certain recently propounded views of his own, when it became his duty, impartially, to criticise them. Sometimes, indeed, this spirit of fairness was almost carried to excess in him, and he lay harder against himself than appeared either quite justifiable, necessary or useful. But then, too, it must be confessed, he very handsomely acknowledged the flattering items, in the way of merit, that stood on the creditor side of the balance sheet of his own personal and patriotic character. In conclusion, we ought to add that he rarely over-stepped the rational bounds of a country Squire's modesty, nor arrogated to himself anything more than the simple idea that he was one of the chief props of his native country, and the brightest ornament of the British Crown—

He was a jewel that the King wore not merely in his diadem but in his heart—that was all.

When these invariable toasts had been drunk, the giver of the feast proposed "Strength and prosperity to the Church"; to which the Rev. Mr. Fallow (who came in uninvited, but with his usual good luck, just in time for the nuts and wine,) loudly replied, proving, after a very curious process of reasoning, that even the Battle of the Nile was won by the connection between Church and State, and winding up with a round of self-congratulation, and a threat uttered against all dissenters from the establishment, and especially the vociferous Pharisee who, calling himself a "preacher," headed a set of ranting Methodists that had lately set up for themselves under the very walls of Mr. Fallow's little parish church. When this speech was concluded, the gentleman with the ear-trumpet begged that that portion of it which related to the Battle of the Nile might be

repeated, as he had not heard all which the speaker had stated upon that subject; and when his request was complied with, he succeeded in convincing the company that the parson had miserably failed in making out his proof of so mysterious a position. Of this he must be a competent judge since his silver tube had greedily swallowed every one of the clerical syllables, and he, the vice-chairman, had himself, once upon a time not specified, helped to man "the wooden walls of old England." Looking to the crew who managed its heavy metal and immense stores, he had not much respect for the Church. When had it ever brought its old enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, to a close engagement? What victories could it boast of? What sacrifices had it ever made, what tythes in kine abandoned? Let Mr. Fallow, if he could, point to a single sucking pig which, when it became his due out of the maternal litter, had mercifully been spared impalement on his kitchen spit. Now,

that, he thought, was coming to the point. (Mr. Fallow was dumb-founded).

"And," concluded the speaker, "I am very sorry to dissent from my worthy relative at the top of the table, but I should like to know what are those priceless services alluded to in his speech, just now, which the Church has performed in this more immediate neighbourhood."

The Major too was silenced.

After this followed certain compliments, intended to propitiate the naval hero, respecting the army and navy, but we shall not report the reply which they elicited. And then the host launched forth again into a sea of eloquence, in answering the next proposed toast of, "the Bench of County Magistrates". But here, as before, his carping, irritable relative thought proper to bring him to account for his words. He made a speech full of irony, which he thus concluded:

"But, seriously, I should exceedingly like to

hear what are those untold benefits, to the society of this place and neighbourhood, so complacently lauded, as having been bestowed upon us by the bench of magistrates which periodically sits at ——. It gives me the greatest pleasure to take my place at this hospitable board in my character as a member of this family, but I cannot allow private considerations to interfere with my public views, and in this case, as in that of the Church, I must take the liberty of asking: What is the work that has been done? Are there no unpunished rogues and vagabonds living still among us? Is not Isaac Ramsay yet unhanged, and abroad like a savage animal of prey? Did not the disputings and absurdities of the bench cover him like a shield?"

Now, during all these various displays of oratory, the wine had been freely circulating, and many of the guests were beginning to feel its exhilarating effects upon them.

The proprieties of the scene were changing,

the laughter was growing louder, the conversation more familiar, the jokes coarser.

Frankum, in particular, according to his natural levity, was rising to the surface of the society, and Major Grimshaw, having "said his say," was soon to gravitate to the bottom of it.

Beside Frankum sat his old prompter the magistrates' clerk, whom, for convenience sake, we shall now call Mr. Lawson; and it may be easily conceived that this person, whose love of farce had years ago, as the reader will remember, urged him to be an abettor and encourager in a scene which, for a time, violated all the decencies and restraints of a court of justice, was equally, if not more, delighted (your practical joker always becomes more incorrigible as he grows older) to give mischievous counsel on the present festive occasion.

"Come Squire," said he, "you know more than any other man in the county about that matter, and after what has come to light so

recently, you appear the only person destined to clear up the whole mystery of Wildman's disappearance in the eyes of the public. Tell us then a little of your mind on the subject —no one should be heard upon it before you." And Frankum, having obtained the Major's permission, rose to address the company.

His face was flushed, and his voice somewhat thickened, but he held himself with dignity, and spoke from out his tight cravat with great care in his pronunciation, and particularity of phrase.

" I must confess," he said, after one or two introductory sentences, " that the last speaker has put a question of unparalleled importance —'is not Ramsay yet unhanged?' I really do not see how the country can regain its tranquillity until that has been answered. For the last sixteen years, men's minds have been thinking of nothing but that—at least I know that such has been the case with me, and I suppose that I am not altogether singular—

(cries of "hear hear.") Thank you, thank you—I receive that cheer; I am not altogether singular. Now it has been also said that the absurdities of the Bench screened Ramsay. That is not quite correct, for had other people (here the speaker looked towards the Revd. Mr. Fallow) done their duty, with the ability displayed by that great and enlightened magistrate, and eminent soldier, Major Grimshaw, things would have gone very differently. My friend Major Grimshaw (I trust he will permit me to call him so) is the greatest magistrate we have yet had, and the future alone can supply his equal. His is a name to connect, or in any way to associate one's self with, which would be the highest honor and the greatest reward." (This remark was by some some understood to refer, vaguely, to a report, then gaining ground abroad, that Frankum aspired not only to the magisterial bench but also to the hand of Miss Grimshaw). "But," persued the orator, "the Bench is yet encumbered

by, here and there, an incompetent person, (another glance towards Mr. Fallow) who prevent its shining out with that degree of effulgence which it would, otherwise, exhibit. These unworthy members must be got rid of and their places supplied by men of another sort—by men, in fact, who have served, or may serve their respective communities: by men born as it were to detect crime, and put a stop to robbery and murder; not stupidly to protect and encourage the perpetrators of them." ("Hear, hear, hear.") Major Grimshaw sat with his eyes fixed on vacancy—or the decanters—and his forehead covered all over with the most perplexed wrinkles. Mr. Fallow could bear it no longer, and retired from the room. "Gentlemen," concluded Frankum, carried beyond himself by the united effects of wine, and his own eloquence, and raised into the very frenzy of triumph by the retreat of his great clerical antagonist, "gentlemen, the reform I wish to see accomplished is already begun.

When that incompetent man has withdrawn from his present legal position, then will my friend Major Grimshaw (that eminent Dragoon officer, whose deeds in the military service only require to be better known to be more spoken of), then, I say, will he appear, as a magistrate, that which he really is as a man."

"But what about the vacant seat?" remarked Mr. Lawson, in an under tone, just as the speaker was hesitating for something more to say.

"And for the vacant seat, gentlemen, I trust—that is I hope—I believe—nay, my friends tell me, that the proper authorities will fill it up with one who will be a comfort and assistance to the declining years of our respected and hospitable host of this evening: by one who, while he serves his country, will be happy to regard himself, in some sort, as a son in the law to that father of the bench, in this county."

"Bravo, bravo! well spoken Frankum," exclaimed half a dozen voices, amid loud laughter and the clattering of glasses.

"What's that, what does he say?" enquired the vice-chairman, eagerly re-adjusting his ear trumpet.

"He hopes soon to be the major's son-in-law," replied the same chorus of voices.

"Never! he never shall by heavens!" vociferated the naval veteran. "I'll warn Grizzle of it—I mean Mrs. Grimshaw—to-morrow morning, the first thing before breakfast. No! presuming, impudent, grey-headed puppy, Julia is looking for higher game! Grimshaw, do you suffer this impertinence at your table?"

But the Major was too confused, too far gone with previous oratory and port wine, too sleepy, in fact, to comprehend the full meaning of the scene that was passing before him; and therefore De Lisle, Arthur Maitland, and one or two besides, easily persuaded him that his

relative had merely mistaken a very innocent joke of Mr. Frankum's.

"Pooh, pooh, Sam!" said he, bristling up and looking as much alive as possible under the circumstances, "you are getting tipsy and can't hold your trumpet steady. What's the use of getting angry or saying anything to Grizzle? Remember the old saying, when a man's drunk let him go to bed."

The major stood a second, as if trying to recollect what he had just said, and doubtful if he had correctly given the proverb he intended to employ. His wine glass was in his hand, as though he meant to propose a toast, but after poising it uneasily, for awhile, and spilling some portion of its contents, he sat down with a great air of dignified command, saying as he did so, "Sam, I remand you! Thomas, help him up stairs, and see that he has a high pillow. Now what comes next?"

"What splendid fun you people in the

country have," observed Ernest de Lisle to Arthur Maitland, who sat next to him during the evening. "Mr. Frankum is a fellow that I should consider indispensable at all my dinner parties, if I had him near me."

"Do let me tell him so," replied Arthur; "he'll be in raptures at the compliment."

"Oh pray then gratify him!"

"Frankum, my good friend!"

But Frankum was talking to everybody, and didn't hear.

"Frankum, Squire Frankum!" that word always attracted his attention.

"Ah! did you speak?" said he, turning round, "'pon my honor Maitland, my boy, I beg your pardon; I really didn't hear you before. Glass of wine, eh? With the greatest pleasure. What are you drinking? Here is some d—d fine Rhenish."

"I wanted to tell you," replied Arthur, "that Mr. De Lisle thinks you by far the wittiest and best fellow at table, and would

like extremely to see you at his house, in London."

"Sir," (bowing pompously to De Lisle), "I feel highly flattered by the compliment. I should exceedingly like to renew my acquaintance with London society; but I fear that more serious occupations will prevent me from doing so. I have had a long season of pleasure, Mr. De Lisle, but a man cannot allow that, alone, to be placed upon his tomb stone. I could tell you of days in town—aye and of nights too—that would make your heart beat; but immortality, sir, immortality, that's now my aim."

"Nonsense, Squire, nonsense," interrupted Arthur, laughing, "you'll never be immortalized except it be for hard riding, drinking and swearing."

"Sir, you mistake me," replied Frankum, looking proudly over his tight cravat; "I assure you that you mistake me. I shall dispose of my horse forthwith, and keep something of

a quieter kind, instead. I was offered fifty guineas for him the other day, but I had not made up my mind then. Mr. De Lisle, permit me, though almost a stranger to you, to offer you the best hunter in this county or the next. He's dirt cheap at fifty, but you shall have him for that as a favor."

"Well, I'll look at him again in the morning," said De Lisle smiling; "but I fancied to-day he appeared but a clumsy brute at his work."

"The beast is not worth his saddle and bridle, Mr. De Lisle," observed Lawson, "and they would disgrace the poorest butcher's hack in the environs of London or elsewhere."

In a moment, Frankum had forgotten his threat of selling his horse, any reflections upon which he always most acutely felt, and never failed to resent, especially when, as now, he was a little the braver for liquor. Turning upon his newly made friend, with lively indignation and scorn, he replied:

"What; a clumsy brute at his work! Why, you've not an animal, in your stable, fit to look at him. Come, now, sir, I'll take the curl out of you: I'll ride you a steeple chase, to-morrow morning, for a hundred guineas."

"Agreed," answered De Lisle, catching up the amusing challenge; "I take your offer, and we will decide the matter whenever the present company shall appoint."

When this affair was fully arranged, and a certain sufficient stake placed in impartial hands, by both parties, a song was called for, and with the demand was coupled the name of Arthur Maitland.

Arthur had a fine, clear, manly voice, and soon restored even his friend Frankum's good humour by singing the following words, to a very spirited air, the whole room, except Major Grimshaw who was asleep, joining in the chorus, at the conclusion of each stanza:—

Away, away, to the blue hills away,
Where breezes are sporting, the children of May;
And sun-beams advancing,
On low-lands are glancing,
And bugles are braying,
And proud steeds are neighing,
Away, away, to the blue hills away.

Then mount, lady, mount, thy good palfrey white,
The red buck is bounding with arrowy flight;
The hounds' bay is sounding,
The woods are resounding,
The woodman is whooping,
The scared owl is hooting,
Away, away, to the blue hills away.

Now still are the woods, their echoes are still,
And the hunters are far over the verge of yon hill;
And that lady's flushed cheek,
And her white courser sleek,
They are far enough now
From the forest's green bough,
Away, and away, o'er the blue hills away.

Other, and possibly better, songs followed, Frankum, who esteemed himself no mean musician, singing what he called "second" to them all—that is, he took part in them by

curiously grumbling over the same words, in a time and key finely distinct from everybody else, and in a style of execution peculiarly his own. The grey morning was breaking in the sky, and the cocks were crowing in the farm premises at the rear of the hall, when this pleasant party quitted its hospitable roof.

CHAPTER XII.

The will! the testament!
Julius Cæsar.

When Barrow and Ramsay parted in the field, on the approach of the hunting party, the former made his way towards the old house at Knowle-water. He did not go there by the ordinary road, but took a path, as nearly straight as possible, across hedges and over stiles, to reach his destination—striding along with wide paces, and a pondering brain. It

was a movement like that of the raven; heavy, rapid, direct and ominous, reminding one of bloody work to be performed somewhere in the distance. The day was singularly mild, for the season; a thin white mist overspread the ground, and the delicate grass, that had lain so long imprisoned beneath the snow, was laden with glittering, and at intervals, as the sun glinted forth more powerfully from beneath the clouds, with prismatic moisture. Here and there, in the sheltered corners of green meadows, an early lamb or two staggered, like little invalids, beside their fleecy dams.

In the country, acquaintance soon passes into something like friendship—at least the growth of familiarity is there much more rapid than it is in large towns. And thus it happened that when Barrow entered the kitchen, at Knowle Water, he was received by Mrs. Wildman with every mark of cordiality and regard, as though she had known him for twenty years.

"Good morning, sir, glad to see you again. You are staying a long time among us poor country folks."

"Yes, my good ma'am, I'm happy among you—happy in observing your happiness, and receiving your country welcome. Life in the country appears to me so much more free from care and trouble than it is in town."

"Ah, sir," observed the widow, with a deep sigh, "I don't know about that exactly; we have our troubles, too—it is not all Christmas party-ing and merry-making with us the year round, Mr. Barrow."

"You speak in an accent that confirms your words, my dear madam. Excuse the question; is anything the matter at present? Have you any fresh cause for grief?"

"Well," replied the good woman, giving way to that momentary weakness which sometimes induces those who are a prey to anxieties to divulge their sorrows to comparative

strangers rather than share them with old and tried friends, "well, sir, since you have asked me the question, I cannot deny but that I have. The times, you see, are hard, and lay some people open to temptation above their strength to bear. I have a son, whom you have not yet seen, that was once as steady a lad as any in the world, but lately he has taken to ways that I don't approve of, and which, I fear, will yet bring us all into trouble."

"Can I, as a stranger, help you in any way? Sometimes friends are less able to assist us than those who are not so connected with us; and in such a case, it would give me sincere pleasure to be of any use to you."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Barrow, your kind sympathy drives me to speak further. The fact, then, is, that my son Edward has foolishly engaged in the smuggling business, and has largely employed my credit to raise money, in order to carry on his dangerous speculations. He has now above a thousand

pounds so embarked; and the detection of their plans, or the loss of one of their vessels, would bring down ruin upon us all, in a moment."

"Indeed! I grieve to hear that, nor do I see how I could be instrumental in averting the calamity that may arise. Yet, nevertheless, what you tell me gives me courage to speak to you upon a subject that I should, otherwise, have hardly known how to introduce. You have a daughter, Mrs. Wildman, whose youthful charms have won my heart. I am a man well off in the world, and anxious to retire from the cares of business. You will now be justly solicitous respecting her future fate, since new troubles may break in upon you at any hour. Can you, will you, afford me opportunities for getting a return of the love which I bear to her? I am aware that my age is unfavourable to my hopes of gaining the affections of one so exquisitely beautiful, but with your aid I might succeed, notwithstanding that."

The poor mother was quite taken by surprise, but she managed to recover herself, and replied:—

"I don't exactly know, Mr. Barrow, but I fear you would encounter a greater obstacle than even your age might prove to you. I would not like to say it outright, but I half suspect that Mary's heart is, already, more out of her own keeping than she herself is, perhaps, quite aware of. You see, there's young Mr. Maitland lives not far off, and Mary's is not a nature, to send coldly away from her so much goodness as he possesses, if he has ever, by word or look, asked her to let him love her."

"Arthur Maitland is a boy, and may make a boy's love to her for a time, but he will soon leave home and forget her. He has the pride of good birth, which will make him scorn your daughter, when, in fashionable society, he meets with her superiors in rank."

"Perhaps Mary has thought of all that, and,

with a girl's spirit, may wish to risk everything, in order to try her woman's power—you don't know her, sir."

"But young Maitland will not have a shilling, except what he works for, and he has yet to acquire a profession."

"My poor Alick, Mr. Barrow, never wooed me with a long purse. I thought a husband might have better qualities than gold...and she may inherit my weakness; who knows?"

"Then you will not give me the permission I have asked for?"

"Why, now, I don't say that, either, Mr. Barrow; I am only showing you the difficulties you may meet with. But I will speak to my daughter on the subject this evening. The fresh alarm, raised about her poor father, has again passed away, and she may be inclined to hear me speak of such a thing to her now, which I could not have done two days since. If she makes no objection, you may depend, sir, I shall raise none."

Mary here entered the room, but did not, as may be easily imagined, in the least guess what had been the nature of the previous conversation between her mother and Barrow. The latter, after remaining about half-an-hour longer, during which time he not unsuccessfully taxed all his powers of pleasing, took leave of his new friends, and wended his way to the quiet, snug little lodgings which he occupied at a pretty village, lying on the neighbouring coast of the channel.

The next evening the mother and daughter were seated alone, together, at needle-work, when the former thus proceeded to fulfil the promise she had made to Barrow:

"Mary, what did your brother reply to you the other day, when you undertook to speak to him about the danger of what he is doing?"

"Nothing very satisfactory, mother. He is, now, too far implicated in the concern to draw back at once; and he believes, besides, that their success is certain. He talks, poor

fellow, of making a large fortune, and then taking the farm off your hands, and giving me half his gains; but oh! how I wish he were contented with the more honest and, therefore, the safer labours of his own quiet way of life—I told him I would not, to save myself from starving even, accept a farthing of wealth so obtained."

"But, my child, have you considered what would be our position should misfortune now attend him? What if you and I were made beggars to-morrow?"

"Don't let us think of it, mother," replied the girl, shuddering at the thought; for she saw before her a great gulf of misery and degradation, in which might perish, for ever, a thousand secret, delicious hopes. What is the anticipated crash of fortune, to the old, in comparison to the prospect of crushed affections, and dreams of happiness all destroyed, to the young? It is no more than the dreaded loss of earth, compared to that of Heaven!

"Yet, Mary," returned the widow, "'tis better we should think of it in time. Would to heaven that I saw you comfortably married to a man able to keep you, and not dependent on business for his income!"

"That is not very likely, I think—I know no story book lover, with a fine house or castle to carry me to; and indeed, if I did, I am not quite sure that I should accept his offer."

"But, nevertheless," replied the mother, "I know one, situated as I have described, who would marry you, directly, if you consented to become his wife. Mr. Barrow, my child, has proposed to me for you; will you accept him if he proves to be all that is reported of him?"

"Oh! that is not like you, mother," exclaimed Mary, with a quivering lip and throbbing heart; "it is not kind, for, although I have never told you so, I am sure you have seen and felt that I love another."

"He is but a boy," said the widow, using

the words of Barrow; "when he grows older he may despise my daughter, as too humble for him."

"No! that he shall never do," answered Mary firmly; "for he shall never know that I love him, as I do, until he has found the means, and is willing at once to marry me. Meanwhile if his feelings change towards me, while he is away, I shall not appear a sacrifice to his pride. But, dear mother, he will not change; I feel he already loves me too much for that."

She stopped a moment, laying down her work as she did so upon her knee, and then added, without raising her usually clear and open, but now slightly contracted brow:

"Yet, Arthur Maitland dislikes Mr. Barrow, and I, somehow, fear him. You may tell him, mother, that you have spoken to me, but obtained no positive answer; then, if he chooses to speak for himself, he can."

While this conversation was going on at the farm, another, equally important to this history,

was taking place in the little, cheerful, old-fashioned parlour of Mr. Greville's parsonage-house. Ernest De Lisle had, with the strong sympathetic instinct of personal goodness, soon discovered that happy fire-side, and was now taking tea with the good old vicar and his family.

"What an excessively pretty girl," said Ernest, addressing his remark to one of the Miss Grevilles, who was herself conspicuously good-looking, "what an excessively pretty girl is that daughter of the poor, lost farmer, about whom I have heard so much, since my arrival at Ackworth Hall!"

"Is she not? I am so pleased to hear you praise her, Mr. De Lisle. She is a very great friend of ours; indeed we have been play-mates, and subsequently at school together. I assure you we think her lovely."

"And, yet, she is even better than she looks," interposed Mr. Greville. "You must know that I am particularly interested in her,

because, I fear, I have most unwittingly done her a very great evil, instead of the good which I intended."

"How so, sir?" asked De Lisle.

"Why, I have been the chief means of giving her an education much above her station in life. When a child, she was exceedingly delicate, and I counselled her mother to have her educated so that she might be able to earn her living as a governess, if necessary. She was, accordingly, placed at school with my own daughters, where she not merely acquired that learning and those accomplishments which I hoped she would, but the training has developed in her so much refinement of thought and gentleness of disposition, that now, when circumstances seem likely to condemn her to the plain life she is leading, I cannot help thinking my advice may cause her a great deal of pain, which she would have escaped had her mind been less cultivated than it is."

"You greatly increase my interest in

the fate of this little rural beauty, Mr. Greville."

"Well, Mr. De Lisle, there is, I assure you, a deep interest in all our minds, here, attaching to the family of the Wildmans. You are as much struck with the girl's beauty as ourselves; you know how she lost her father, and I have yet to tell you, that had it not been for another untoward and mysterious accident, the family would, at this day, have been in a very different position from that in which you now see it. They are well connected, several of their distant relatives being likewise persons of great wealth. About fifty years ago, an old uncle of the late Alick Wildman made the following peculiar will:—He began his testament by saying, that the great difficulty to be overcome in founding a high and worthy family was, that of first raising it to such a point of wealth and fame, that there might exist sufficient pride and emulation long to sustain it

against the manifold shocks it would inevitably have to submit to, through the ill-conduct, or natural incapacity of degenerate members. He then went into a kind of theory of his own, on the subject, showing that the decay of families was under the same general rules as regulated the decay of all animal and vegetable beings. Thus, he asserted the life of a whale to be longer than that of a minnow; the duration of an oak, to exceed that of a mushroom, and Q. E. D., the stability of a ducal house to be greater than that of the most adroit and painstaking of respectable tinkers. And then he willed as follows:—I place the whole of my property (I give only the substance of the will, continued Mr. Greville,) in the hands of trustees for a period of thirty years, after my death; and they are directed to educate both alike, at school, and at one of the universities, my two grand-nephews, Philip and Alexander, the sons of my nephew, George Wildman, allowing them a sufficient sum for all their wants, proportioned to the education I have ordained,

until they attain the age of seventeen years respectively, when they are to have £3,000 a year, placed at the disposal of each of them, without restriction, for the residue of the thirty years above named. When that time expires, if they can satisfy the trustees then being, that they are married men, and have never been, at any time, above two hundred poundsin debt for a longer space than three months together, I do hereby will that they shall, being so proved worthy of my life's earnings, equally inherit the whole of my estates, yielding an income of eight thousand per annum. Should one of them act contrary to my views, herein declared, his share shall be given to his brother; and in case they both prove undeserving of the good which I here intend them, then I will, that my property be inherited by the nearest living descendents of Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond, formerly Elizabeth Villiers, fourth daughter of the Rev. Samuel Villiers of ———, in the County of ———. And then this eccentric

will concluded with a long series of clauses, providing for every accident that might happen to defeat the intentions of the testator, among which was this one, upon which so much of the present tale depends:—It was declared that in case either of the two boys named should die before reaching the age of ten years, then, as the testator's whole scheme would have totally failed (for he evidently thought to secure at least one good man out of the competition between the two brothers) then the entire property was to go, at once, to the children of the above mentioned Mrs. Hammond, who was once on the point of being married to the testator.

"Well, Mr. De Lisle," continued Mr. Greville, "when this will was made, which seems to me to have been a very poor plan for forcing a virtuous and prosperous family into existence to enjoy the accumulated wealth of him who so disposed of it, George Wildman's two boys

were very young, the eldest hardly two years old and the youngest but six months. Within a surprisingly short time afterwards, only a few weeks, I believe, the testator died, and the will, of course, came into operation; and then Providence appeared to reject its folly by what occurred. The elder of the two children, Philip Wildman, mysteriously disappeared, like his poor brother Alick did, as you know, later in life, and no traces of him were ever discovered. His nurse took him out in her arms, one morning, and did not return home at the usual hour. Search was then made after her, and her body was found, the next day, washed in by the spring tide upon the sands of yonder river. The death of the child was presumed; the money all went to the Hammonds, and Alick Wildman, instead of returning to the state and position in life of his ancestors, pursued the downward path of that branch of his family, becoming at length

an honest and most intelligent farmer, and so maintaining himself to the day of his singular disappearance, now sixteen years since."

"How very odd," observed De Lisle, "that the two heirs, of so remarkable a will, should have so curiously vanished. By the bye, Miss Greville, is it true, as Miss Grimshaw tells me, that young Mr. Maitland is fond of the widow's daughter?"

"Really, Mr. De Lisle, I cannot answer that question, although Arthur Maitland is another of our very particular favorites. Perhaps, indeed, that is the very reason why we have been at such little pains to discover all his secrets. The inmates of Ackworth Hall are evidently better informed people, on particular local subjects than ourselves."

"I understand you, Miss Greville, and can only say that, if there is any truth in the report, the future artist has early shown his appreciation of a style of beauty that would certainly have charmed the unrivalled eye of

his great predecessor Corregio. But I must now say good-night. I shall accept the *carte-blanche* you have kindly given me, Mr. Greville, and run over here, when I am off duty with my good friends the Grimshaws."

END OF VOL. I.

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